

Mystery Cults and the Polis of Athens: A Reading of *Bakchai* and *Frogs*

[Volume One of One]

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of Doctor of Philosophy in Classics.

[May 2019]

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**Signed:**

## Abstract

This work is dedicated to a comparative study of Euripides' *Bakchai* and Aristophanes' *Frogs* (also "the plays") in their religious, historical and political context and in particular in their connection with mystery cults.

Aristophanes had his comedy *Frogs* performed at the Lenaia festival in the winter of 405. The son of Euripides had his father's tragedy *Bakchai* produced at the Great Dionysia at some point after Euripides' death, possibly in the spring of the same year 405. The two plays have several points in common: the protagonist, the god Dionysos; they are both rich in themes, motifs and images connected with the initiation cults of Dionysos (in *Bakchai*) and those of Demeter (in *Frogs*); the choruses have the same role on stage as they have in their cultic reality in the theatre, worshippers of the deity; the two plays were awarded the first prize.

This thesis is dedicated to exploring the plays in their Athenian religious and socio-political context, a theme largely ignored by classical scholars. By estimating the number of mystic initiates in Athens at the end of the fifth century the thesis shows that mystic initiates were a sizable part of the population and therefore of theatre audiences, likely to be sensitive to the plays' mystic and civic content and able to influence public opinion. It examines the way Athenian audiences perceived the impact of public poetry and drama performances and shows that their effect on audiences was associated with a religious experience; it follows the thread of mystic and civic values in the perception of ancient writers before and during the Peloponnesian War and

evaluates the role of those values in the development of Athenian political consciousness during the fifth century; it analyses the political atmosphere in Athens in the period the plays were written, after the restoration of democracy in 410 and on the eve of the restoration of oligarchic rule by the Thirty that was followed by open *stasis* and the civic reconciliation of 403. This thesis proposes a new interpretation of the texts of the plays to evidence the relevance of their religious content in the political conditions Athens found itself in. The two plays delivered a message to the polis that was inspired by mystery cults, a message at the same time religious, ethical and political: the reconciliation of the polis' social, religious and political conflicts through the acceptance of mystery cults and of their rituals.

## **Acknowledgments**

I am deeply grateful to my supervisors, Richard Seaford and Lynette Mitchell, for their patient assistance in transforming an embryonic mass of ideas and digressions into a cohesive thesis. On a personal level, I am grateful for my family, Paula, Cosima and Luigi, for having supported my effort through the years. I also am indebted to my analyst Diane Zervas Hirst for having encouraged me to feed my passion for classical Greece. I dedicate the thesis to the memory of my Greek brother Konstantinos Gouzelis.

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## Introduction

*Frogs* was produced by Philonides at the Lenaia festival, which took place around the 12<sup>th</sup> day of Gamelion of the year when “the old temple of Athena at Athens was burned, Pythias being ephor at Sparta and Kallias archon at Athens” as Xenophon notes.<sup>1</sup> In our calendar it was around the end of January-beginning of February 405. The play was awarded first prize. We have no direct evidence on the date of *Bakchai*’s production, other than a note on Aristotle’s *Didaskaliai* that the play was produced by Euripides’ son in Athens together with *Iphigeneia in Aulis* and *Alkmeon* after the playwright’s death that took place in 407/6. Some scholars, such as Webster, Cantarella, Kovacs and Hall, believe *Bakchai* was staged at the Great Dionysia of 405, some two months later than *Frogs*.<sup>2</sup> The trilogy that included *Bakchai* won the first prize.

Accepting the hypothesis of Kovacs and others, both plays were produced in the late winter/spring of 405, after the Athenians’ major naval victory at Arginousai that was followed by the divisive and controversial trial against some of the victorious generals (end of summer 406 – end of autumn 406). The Spartan final naval victory at Aigospotamoi (summer 405) lay a few weeks ahead, while the summer of 404 witnessed the re-establishment of an oligarchic regime in Athens that was followed by the revolt of the democrats and the return of the polis to a democratic constitution and the civic reconciliation of 403.

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<sup>1</sup> Xenophon *Hellenika* 1.18.6.

<sup>2</sup> Webster 1967 p. 257, Cantarella 1974 pp. 291-292, n. 2, Kovacs 2002 p. 2, Hall 2016, p. 17.

The two plays, despite their authors' distinctive artistic personalities and different theatrical genre, show significant similarities: the coincidence of the short period in which they were produced, the mystic ritual content of their choral odes,<sup>3</sup> the figure of the god Dionysos as protagonist and architect of political action, the role of the chorus that is at the same time religious and theatrical (see 5.9) and the fusion of mystic, ethical and political concepts (see 5.10-11). These similarities, unique in extant tragedies and comedies, suggest that Euripides and Aristophanes reacted to a common religious and political context and shared a similar political purpose, that of encouraging the reconciliation of the political tensions existing in Athens. The first prize awarded to *Frogs* and to Euripides' trilogy is evidence for the popularity of the plays, not only because of their aesthetic merits, but also of their religious and moral content.

Despite the vast number of scholarly works separately dedicated to the two plays,<sup>4</sup> to mystery cults,<sup>5</sup> to the development of moral and political thought in Athens during the sixth and fifth centuries<sup>6</sup> and to the role of theatrical representations in the polis,<sup>7</sup> no scholar has attempted a comparative reading

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<sup>3</sup> The theme of several non-extant classic tragedies was related to mystic cults, such as for instance Aeschylus' *Lycurgeia*, *Bakchai*, *Edonians*, *Eleusinians*, *Pentheus*, *Bassarai*. Cf. Mills 2006 pp.34-35.

<sup>4</sup> Fundamental works quoted in this work on *Bakchai* include, *inter alia*, Dodds 1940 and 1960, Winnington-Ingram 1948 and 1966, Musurillo 1966, Roux 1972, Foley 1980, Segal 1982, Oranje 1984, Vernant 1985, Seaford 1996, Versnel 1998, Kovacs 2002, Mills 2006. Works on *Frogs* include Stanford 1958, Segal 1961, Konstan 1986, Dover 1993, Sommerstein 1997, Lada-Richards 1999, Henderson 2002, Edmonds III 2004, Marshall and Kovacs 2008, Griffith 2013, Stuttard 2016.

<sup>5</sup> Scholarship on the Eleusinian Mysteries is vast. Recent studies include Burkert 1983 and 1985, Richardson 1974, Foley 1994, Clinton 1992 and 2004, Sourvinou-Inwood 2003a, Cosmopoulos 2003 and 2015, Parker 2005.

<sup>6</sup> Relevant to the scope of this work would be, *inter alia*, Ostwald 1955 and 1986, de Ste. Croix 1972, Gomme 1981, Seaford 1994 and 2012, Parker 1998, Price 2001, Raaflaub 2003, Morgan 2003, Lewis 2006, Hornblower 2008.

<sup>7</sup> Among others, Pickard-Cambridge 1962, Seaford 1981, 1994, 2000, 2012, 2013, Henrichs 1990 and 1994/5, Zeitlin 1990, Goldhill 1987, Csapo and Slater 1994, McGlew 2002, Henderson 2003, Sourvinou-Inwood 2003, Murray and Wilson 2004, Kowalzig 2007, Revermann and Wilson 2008, Wiles 2011.

of these two plays in their common historical and religious context, key to the interpretation of the plays and of the role of mystery cults in the polis of Athens.

A note on method is needed at this point. As modern readers of the plays we tend to find it difficult to adapt to the Athenians' collective imagination and its complex fabric that connects religion and politics, myth and reality, mystic rituals and theatre productions, political concepts and mystery cults. This has negatively influenced modern interpretation of Greek history, religion, poetry and theatre, all subjects that have largely been treated as separate, largely independent fields. This has made the study of complex fields such as the Greek perception of divinity somewhat difficult. At the end of his introduction to his work on Andokides and the Herms, Furley for instance interestingly observes that "there is no area of ancient society which has vanished so completely from our awareness as the feeling that the company of Olympian gods is acting behind the scenes, registering offences and worthy deeds, aiding the pious and punishing the impious ... the history of Greek religion in the modern period has suffered from a tendency to consider the object of its study as a separate and clearly-defined entity within Greek society".<sup>8</sup> Similarly, Sourvinou-Inwood states the need to reconstruct the perceptual filters of fifth-century Athenian audiences in order to see tragedy performances in their essence of ritual performances.<sup>9</sup> Modern perceptual filters have influenced

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<sup>8</sup> Furley 1996, p. 11.

<sup>9</sup> Sourvinou-Inwood 2003, pp. 1: "In theory, tragedy could have involved religious exploration even if it had been a purely theatrical experience, in which religious elements were no more than theatrical devices. But what I am arguing is something different: that tragedy was perceived by the fifth-century audiences not as a discrete unit, a purely theatrical experience, simply framed by ritual, but as a ritual performance; and that the deities and other religious elements in the tragedies were not insulated from the audience's religious realities, but were perceived to be, to a greater or lesser extent, somehow close to those realities, part of those realities."



most scholarship works on *Frogs* and *Bakchai*, which has led to serious misunderstanding of these plays (see 5.1). In this thesis, I shall try as much as possible to reconstruct the Athenian perception of the moral and mystic themes of the plays.

In this thesis, I argue that:

- in late fifth-century Athens, the civic and moral values of mystery cults came to be associated with an anti-tyrannical and egalitarian vision of the polis and were a fundamental constituent of the formation and development of the Athenian concept of democracy;
- the similarities between *Frogs* and *Bakchai* are not fortuitous, but dictated by their shared mystic and political content that was interrelated to the troubled historical context of the period when they were written;
- the re-enactment in the theatre of Dionysos of some parts of mystery cults' rituals had the function of restoring the moral and civic cohesion of the polis of Athens in a critical moment of its history.

This thesis is organised as follows:

- Chapter 1 contains this introduction and defines the concept of mystic initiation in archaic and classical Greece.
- Chapter 2 contains a demographic estimate of the religious and political weight of mystic initiates in the population of Athens and in theatre audiences in order to reconstruct the emotional interaction between theatre

performances and Athenian audiences and of the role of the chorus in this interaction.

- Chapter 3 explores some themes for the way Athenians perceived the political implications of mystery cults as expressed in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, in Aeschylus' *Oresteia* and in some episodes of Athenian history prior to the Peloponnesian War.
- Chapter 4 is dedicated to tracing the role and influence of mystery cults in the development of Athenian political consciousness in the second half of the fifth century through some episodes of Athenian political life;
- Chapter 5 is dedicated to an analysis of the mystic, civic and political implications of *Bakchai* and *Frogs* through their connection with mystery cults.
- Chapter 6 contains my conclusions.

## 1.1 Mystic Initiation.

As we shall observe in chapter 5 of this thesis, much of the content of *Frogs* and *Bakchai* is connected to mystery cults and to the emotions that the enactment of mystic rituals raised in the audiences. In order to set a background to the reception of the plays in fifth-century Athens, in this section we shall explore the depth and strength of reactions that connected late fifth-century Athenians

with the initiation rituals that were shared by both Dionysiac and Demetrian cults (see 5.2).

With the exception of Bremmer<sup>10</sup> and Bowden,<sup>11</sup> the study of mystery cults from an anthropological point of view has received limited attention from classical scholars, despite the similarity of initiation and ecstatic cults found in several cultures and in different ages and states of human civilisation. In several pre-modern cultures, initiation rituals are a religious tool used by a community in order to maintain its spiritual and civic cohesion by connecting each individual with the community's traditions and its collective imagination, a phenomenon we shall observe in our analysis of their influence on Athens' political life in the second half of the fifth-century in chapter 4.

In many cultures, the role of initiation rituals is central in creating the self-definition of a community. In his analysis of anthropological studies of the initiation rituals of Australia's aboriginal tribes, Eliade<sup>12</sup> for instance comments that initiation rituals "reactivate the connections between the human world and the divine world of the sky ... form part of a grandiose reiteration of the cosmogony, of the anthropogony ... (and) is the occasion for a total regeneration of the cosmos and the collectivity".<sup>13</sup> Similarly in classical Greece, initiation in the Eleusinian and Dionysiac mysteries was a deep emotional, life-changing experience of near-death followed by a new birth that connected the individual and his collectivity to cosmic order, as it did in Eliade's tribes. But unlike in those tribes, it was perhaps the only religious experience that was not

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<sup>10</sup> Bremmer 1984 pp. 267-286.

<sup>11</sup> Bowden 2010 and in particular chapter 11, "Encountering the Sacred".

<sup>12</sup> Eliade 1994 (1958) pp. 28-50.

<sup>13</sup> Eliade 1994 (1958) p. 42, 49.

the duty of the individual as part of a collective body, such as other religious and civic rituals such as the Brauron and the Apatouria rites of passage.<sup>14</sup> In Athens, individuals chose to become initiands out of their own volition<sup>15</sup> and were conscious that initiation in the mysteries would have changed their lives forever, in the hope to ensure for themselves a prosperous life and a blissful afterlife. Unlike the political bodies of the polis of Athens, mystic initiation was open to all who could speak Greek and were not guilty of murder (see 2.1). It thus exposed the members of the community who did not have a public voice, such as women, slaves and metics, to religious and ethical issues that were also part of the polis' significant political themes.

Mystic initiation was an experience that went beyond what could be expressed in words. Aristotle famously noted that initiates are not expected to learn anything, (οὐ μαθεῖν τι δεῖν), but to suffer pain and to change their state of mind (παθεῖν καὶ διατεθῆναι).<sup>16</sup> Unlike matters that can be taught, those pertaining to mystic initiation impact men like a flash illuminating the soul, souls that are moulded by the visions the initiand witnesses.<sup>17</sup> While allusions to the theme of initiation occur in several later ancient authors,<sup>18</sup> accounts of the emotional experience of the initiand going through the ritual are rarer. They occur for instance in Plato and Plutarch in two well-known passages that define

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<sup>14</sup> See on this point Brelich 1969 p. 461.

<sup>15</sup> Herodotos 8.65.4: "ὁ βουλόμενος ... μυεῖται".

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Burkert 1987 p. 89.

<sup>17</sup> Aristotle *de Philosophia* fr. 15 (Ross 1952, p. 87). Cf. also Plato letter 7.341c on the impossibility to express in clear words (ῥητὸν) the subjects he seriously studies as they come suddenly to the soul after continued application and communion with them and cannot be communicated.

<sup>18</sup> For instance, Apuleius *Metamorphoses* 11.23, Dion Chrysostomos *Orations* 12.33, Theon of Smyrna *Mathematics* 1.25, and, in a different key, Clement of Alexandria *Protrepticus* 2.

concepts that are the keys to the emotional reception by the Athenian audiences to the mystic content of *Bakchai* and *Frogs* (see 5.8-10)

Plato describes mystic initiation in vivid images in, among other passages, *Phaedrus* 249c-250b-c, a text that contains several patterns of mystic initiation themes, well explored by Riedweg.<sup>19</sup> In that dialogue Plato has Sokrates revealingly describe his speech as a balanced and religiously auspicious mythical prayer (μυθικόν ὕμνον μετρίως τε καὶ εὐφήμως) (265c), a text that associates the traditional formula of *euphemia* that opened religious rituals with the values associate in Athens with the middle way in learning and politics.<sup>20</sup> The second source I focus on is Plutarch's well-known fragment 178 (Sandbach).<sup>21</sup> The passage, which dates from around the second half of the first century AD, reads as if written from personal experience; it may well have been one as Plutarch was, together with his wife, an initiate of the Dionysiac mystery cult<sup>22</sup> and a high priest of the Apollo sanctuary in Delphi, familiar with mystic texts, rituals and liturgies, as were in all likelihood the author of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, Aeschylus, Aristophanes and Euripides.

Among the realities in heaven are concepts central to the political and mystic content of *Bakchai* and *Frogs*, the concepts of δικαιοσύνη, εὐδαίμονια and σωφροσύνη (Plato, *Phaedrus* 247d, 250b-c). These are realities that, Plato writes, are nearly invisible in our world, and only apparent in heaven, along with the chorus blessed by the gods (σὺν εὐδαίμονια χορῶ), that accompanies Zeus.

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<sup>19</sup> Riedweg 1986 pp. 30-59.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Plato *Euthydemus* 305c-d.

<sup>21</sup> Quoted by Stobaios 4.52.48-49, probably out of Plutarch's *de Anima*.

<sup>22</sup> Plutarch *Consolatio ad uxorem* 10: "ὁ πάτριος λόγος καὶ τὰ μυστικά σύμβολα τῶν περὶ τὸν Διόνυσον ὀργιασμῶν, ἃ σὺνισμεν ἀλλήλοις οἱ κοινωνοῦντες."

We shall encounter the same definition of the chorus of initiates blessed by the gods in *Frogs* 156 and the same terms expressing key mystic and civic values in *Bakchai* and *Frogs* (see 5.9-11), evidence for those mystic concepts vitality in Athens.

The civic and religious theme of the internecine struggle to which mankind is condemned and its contrast with the peaceful and orderly community of initiates is a theme that we shall encounter in *Bakchai* and *Frogs* as the basis for the polis to reconstruct itself (see 5.10). In Plato's *Phaedrus* this contrast is expressed by powerful images of those souls that, striving to reach the upper region beyond heaven in their chariots, fall behind Zeus' flying procession. As they are dragged down, they fight, trample and collide with each other in confusion and sweat to gain a view of reality, the plain of truth, where are the meadows (λειμῶνες)<sup>23</sup> that are the best pasturage for souls (248a-b). The chaos created by isolated individualism that threatens the collectivity can only be overcome by initiation, the theme of Plutarch's fragment 178 (Sandbach) and of a passage of one of his philosophical works, *Quomodo quis suos in virtute sentiat profectus*.<sup>24</sup> In these texts the pattern that we shall encounter in the interpretation of several episodes of Athens' history and key to the moral and political content of *Bakchai* and *Frogs* is vividly summarised. The ordeal of the initiand, his near death, the lack of cohesion of the crowd of non-initiate individuals that puts a community into dangerous turmoil, the role of mystic cults in reshaping the community as an orderly and cohesive polis, form a mystic/civic pattern that underlies *Bakchai* and *Frogs*.

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<sup>23</sup> Meadows are a powerful image symbolising the other-worldly peaceful realm of the gods. See 5.7.

<sup>24</sup> Plutarch *Quomodo quis suos in virtute sentiat profectus* 81e.

On the point of death, Plutarch relates in fragment 178, the soul has the same emotional experience of men going through the great initiation rituals (πάσχει πάθος οἷον οἱ τελεταῖς μεγάλαις κατοργιαζόμενοι). During the rituals the soul goes first through “wanderings and exhaustive running around ... uncomplete journeys through periods of darkness (διὰ σκότους τινές), ... all that is marvellous and horrid, shuddering and trembling and sweat and bewilderment (τὰ δεινὰ πάντα, φρίκη καὶ τρόμος καὶ ἰδρῶς καὶ θάμβος)”. But after this the soul is met by a marvellous light (φῶς θαυμάσιον) and received into pure places and meadows (τόποι καθαροὶ καὶ λειμῶνες) where there are voices and dances, and the solemnity of sacred sounds and holy visions (φωνὰς καὶ χορείας καὶ σεμνότητος ἀκουσμάτων ἱερῶν καὶ φασμάτων ἁγίων ἔχοντες). There the now perfect and initiated soul (ὁ παντελὴς ἤδη καὶ μεμνημένος) is free from all masters and from worldly business (ἐλεύθερος καὶ ἄφρετος), celebrates the sacred rituals (ὀργιάζει) in the company with holy and pure men (σύνεστιν ὁσίοις καὶ καθαροῖς ἀνδράσι), and surveys the uninitiated and impure mob of living men (τὸν ἀμύητον ... τῶν ζώντων καὶ ἀκάθαρτον ἐφορῶν ὄχλον) who, herded together mired in deep mud<sup>25</sup> and gloomy fog (ἐν βορβόρῳ πολλῷ καὶ ὀμίχλῃ), trample one another down and, in their fear of death cling to their ills, since they disbelieve in the blessings of the other world.

Plutarch also uses Eleusinian mystic images and concepts in *Quomodo quis suos in virtute sentiat profectus*, where he describes the similarity of the behaviour of mystic initiands and of those beginning their philosophical studies.<sup>26</sup> Mystic initiands (οἱ τελούμενοι) rush to the temples with great noise and shouts (ἐν

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<sup>25</sup> The term βόρβορος to denote the life of non-initiates recurs in various mystic texts associated with mystery cults, such as for instance in Plato *Phaedo* 69c and in Aelius Aristides *Orationes* 19.259.

<sup>26</sup> Plutarch *Quomodo quis suos in virtute sentiat profectus* 81d-f.

θορύβῳ καὶ βοῇ) and push each other. But when the holy mystic rituals are performed and disclosed (δρωμένων δὲ καὶ δεικνυμένων τῶν ἱερῶν) they stand in fear and silence (μετὰ φόβου καὶ σιωπῆς). The would-be philosophers behave in a similar way. About the doors of philosophy, one can see great mayhem, talking and excitement (πολὺν θόρυβον καὶ λαλιὰν καὶ θρασυτητα), but, once the initiate into philosophy succeeds in entering the doors, he sees a great light (μέγα φῶς) as if a shrine was opened (οἶον ἀνακτόρων ἀνοιγομένων) and suddenly behaves in silence and fear (μετὰ φόβου καὶ σιωπῆς) and humbly and orderly attends (ταπεινὸς καὶ κεκοσμημένος)<sup>27</sup> reason as upon a god.

Some notes on Plutarch's passages are needed, in order to focus on the key mystic concepts that we shall also find at the foundations of the religious, moral and political content of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, in *Oresteia* and in *Bakchai* and *Frogs*. The two passages express vividly the deepest contrast. On one side there is life before and during the initial part of initiation, when the soul is isolated, forlorn and hopeless, wandering aimlessly, a soul that is thrown into fights because of its fear of death, caused by its ignorance of the blessings that await the initiated in Hades. The life of the impure mob in mud (βόρβορος) is a term that occurs also in Aristophanes' *Frogs* 145 to define the hostile grounds through which one reaches Hades. The disorderly crowd of uninitiated produces only fear, violent individual competition, disorder, excitement and confusion, a condition that is the opposite of that of the processions of initiates and of the order of a cohesive polis.

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. Plato *Laws* 716a.



On the other side, life after initiation is joyful, pure and holy: initiates are orderly, silent, and in amazement and awe in front of divinity. The term used to express the order and discipline of the initiate (κεκοσμημένος) expresses the ethical and political contrast between uninitiated, disorderly mankind and the well-ordered, egalitarian community of pure and holy initiates, a concept we shall analyse in 5.9-10 with regard to the choral behaviour in *Bakchai*. The disciplined order of the blissful community of initiates, its freedom from masters, their delight in the performance of rituals and its contrast with the desperate, painful and blind wanderings of the individual, stresses the central role of the antinomy of the collective versus the individual in mystic cults. It is also the religious and civic pattern that accompanies the development of Athenian political beliefs on the nature of political equality and of the polis' anti-tyrannical stance as bases of civic cohesion and harmony. Traces of this pattern can be found for instance in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (see 3.2), in the finale of *Oresteia* (see 3.4), in Xenophon's account of the overthrow of the Thirty (see 4.3) and in *Bakchai* and *Frogs* (see 5.9-10).

## 2 Mystery Initiates and Theatre Audiences at Athens

Why did Euripides and Aristophanes use religious mystic themes in that critical moment in the life of Athens? Did the plays' mystic content translate into an ethical and civic message that could be put into effect as a collective political reflection and action? The public success of *Frogs* and of the *Bakchai* trilogy suggests the familiarity of the audience with mystery cults and implies that theatre audiences in Athens at the end of the fifth century had a political weight that could influence the political life in Athens. One of the reasons may lie in

the population of initiates in the city. In this chapter I shall examine in mainly demographic terms the evidence for the dimension of the population of initiates in Athens and for the presence of initiates in theatre audiences before turning to the way Greeks perceived their experience as theatre-goers. Theatre audiences and mystic initiates have in common their social and gender inclusiveness, as they both included metics, women and slaves, which makes estimates particularly difficult and results debatable in the absence of reliable contemporary evidence.<sup>28</sup>

## 2.1 Mystery initiates, some numbers.

In view of the density of the mystic content of *Bakchai* and *Frogs*, I shall try to explore the question of the numbers and influence of initiates in Athenian life, politics and theatre, a point rarely explored in depth by scholars. Modern readers may be influenced by the modern notion of initiates as a small cabal of eccentrics affiliated to a spiritualist secret cult, and of theatre goers as a small number of lovers of dramatic arts: reality in Athens was different. The Eleusis festival in honour of Demeter and Persephone and the City Dionysia were, together with the Panathenaia, the occasions where rituals affirming the Athenian religious and civic identity would be performed publicly by the mass of people living in the city.

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<sup>28</sup> On the inclusiveness of theatre audiences, see Csapo and Slater 1994 pp. 286-317; on the presence of women in audiences see 2.2; on the inclusiveness of Eleusinian rituals see for instance Demosthenes *Contra Neaira* 21-23, where Lysias the orator could initiate into the Mysteries his mistress Metaneira, a slave of the brothel keeper Nikaretes of Corinth, with no apparent opposition.

While we cannot define Dionysiac and Demetrian initiates in Athens as a cohesive community sharing a common religious and political identity, the fact that initiates were individuals united by a common deep spiritual experience and by a shared set of religious, civic and moral beliefs is of importance. They would have had influence on the political ethos of the polis, particularly in moments of political divisions, as we shall see in chapter 4 of this work. It is therefore of some importance to try and evaluate the relative weight of the population of initiates in Athens. What evidence do we have for the demographic dimensions of mystic initiates in Athens? Is it possible to assume that initiates represented a sizable and therefore politically influential part of the polis?

There exists no hard evidence to answer these questions, and only a few scholars have devoted attention to this matter. Some scholars have suggested that initiates would have been a considerable part of the population. Burkert writes that in his opinion most Athenians were initiated,<sup>29</sup> while, in their article on the relationship between the Dionysiac *thiasos* and politics in the polis, Bérard and Bron write : “Mais si, à Athènes il n’y a jamais eu crise dionysiaque, c’est bien parce que au départ, la cite toute entière était initiée.”<sup>30</sup> As Parker puts it, “it seems to have been the norm for Athenians who could afford it to undergo initiation”,<sup>31</sup> while Sourvinou-Inwood notes: “There is every reason to think that the large majority of Athenians were initiated ... The large majority

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<sup>29</sup> Burkert 1985 pp. 285-6.

<sup>30</sup> Bérard and Bron 1986 p. 27.

<sup>31</sup> Parker 2005 p. 343, on the basis of Andokides *De Mysteriis* 111 and on Terence’s *Phormio* 49, a Latin version of *Epidikazomenos*, a New Comedy play by Apollodorus of Karystos.

of fifth-century Athenians, I assume, were initiates of the Eleusinian Mysteries.”<sup>32</sup>

As the question has been largely ignored by scholars despite its relevance on the impact of mystery cults on the polis of Athens, it is worthwhile to examine it briefly. We shall examine some demographic and archaeological evidence in order to produce an estimate of the ratio of initiates/total population which may support the views of Burkert, Bérard and Bron, Parker and Sourvinou-Inwood. In order to do so, we shall assess firstly the question of the urban population of the urban agglomeration of Athens/Piraeus in the second half of the fifth century. The matter is still highly controversial and has been discussed by scholars for decades: estimates vary wildly in the absence of clear evidence. For instance, Gomme estimates the total inhabitants of Athens and Piraeus in the times of Perikles at some 155,000,<sup>33</sup> Raaflaub suggests a total of 150,000-240,000 people,<sup>34</sup> and Scott quotes the figures of 120-150,000.<sup>35</sup> In his detailed analysis of the question Hansen estimates the total population of Attika in the Periclean period at some 300,000 or more and the number of male citizens in 431 at some 60,000, reduced by the war and the plague to 30,000 by 406/5.<sup>36</sup> For Strauss for instance, the total population of Athens after the Peloponnesian war and the plague amounted to a total of 56-65,000.<sup>37</sup> We shall retain as acceptable estimates the figure of 150,000 for the population of Athens and Piraeus at the

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<sup>32</sup> Sourvinou-Inwood 2003 p. 249-250. It is a pity that Sourvinou-Inwood did not further her exploration of this theme in her work on Tragedy and Athenian religion.

<sup>33</sup> Gomme 1933 p. 47.

<sup>34</sup> Raaflaub 1998 p. 29.

<sup>35</sup> Scott 2005 p. 520.

<sup>36</sup> Hansen 1988 p. 12.

<sup>37</sup> Strauss 1986, p. 80-81.

beginning of the Peloponnesian War and that of 65,000 at the end of the century, at the time when *Bakchai* and *Frogs* were produced.

Out of this number, how many were the mystic initiates in Athens?

Unfortunately we have no evidence on the number of Dionysiac initiates in Athens, apart from some later evidence for the maenadic cult in the polis.<sup>38</sup> The Eleusinian cult of Demeter offers some more evidence to estimate the number of Eleusinian initiates in Athens, the first of which is the dimensions of the holy places of Demeter. The dimensions of the Eleusis Demeter sanctuary and of the Telesterion may provide some initial hard evidence for the popularity of the cult in the context of Attika's religious life. By its dimensions the sanctuary was very large. The sanctuary covered an area of some 24,000 square metres, comparable to the area of the Akropolis, and roughly half of the open-air area of the Athenian agora, which measured some 50,000 square metres. The Telesterion rebuilt in Perikles' times by the architects Koroibos, Metagenes and Xenokles measured 51.55 X 51.20 metres, a surface of 2,640 square metres. The Telesterion was thus an extremely large religious building by Athenian criteria, second in Perikles' Athens only to the Odeion, the large and covered public structure adjacent to the theatre of Dionysos that covered 4,280 square metres,<sup>39</sup> but that served several other public functions, such as musical performances, choral rehearsals, public meetings, and occasionally as military barracks. A study by Still, Professor of Crowd Science at the Manchester Metropolitan University, establishes the space needed by one person in a comfortable and

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<sup>38</sup> Maenadism was not limited to Attika but was a ritual common to the whole Greek world. See for instance Henrichs 1978 pp. 121-160, and Bremmer 1984 pp. 267-286.

<sup>39</sup> An area comparable to the that of the Royal Albert Hall.

loose standing crowd as 1-1.5 square metres.<sup>40</sup> If filled to this level, the Telesterion would have been large enough for some 1,800-2,600 people.

How many *mystai* would be initiated each year? On the basis of his analysis of the epigraphic records of the *epistatai* for the year 408-7, Clinton estimates a “reasonable total” of some 2,150 *mystai* having been initiated in the year 408-7.<sup>41</sup> Basing herself on the same evidence Cavanaugh comes to a similar total of 2,200.<sup>42</sup> Parker later corrected this total to 2,400.<sup>43</sup> Bremmer believes that *mystai* and *epoptai* present at the rituals were some 3,000, a figure that is not incompatible with the figures of Clinton, Cavanaugh and Parker.<sup>44</sup> It is obviously impossible to speculate further on these figures as the Telesterion may not have been full each year and as we have no evidence on the number of *epoptai* participating in the rituals, but this hypothesis offers grounds to consider it possible that initiates in Athens numbered a comparatively large amount of people, and larger as a percentage of the population towards the end of the century as population decreased. Adopting Parker’s 2005 figure of 2,400 new initiates per annum on a post war population of 65,000, we may tentatively imagine the ratio of initiates versus the total population in Athens to reach some 40% in the space of ten years, which would confirm the insight of Burkert, Bérard and Bron, Parker and Sourvinou-Inwood.

How influential were initiates in Athens’ political scene? By the very nature of initiation cults, initiates were not a homogeneous political group, but

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<sup>40</sup> Still 2017.

<sup>41</sup> Clinton 1974 p. 13, n. 13.

<sup>42</sup> Cavanaugh 1996 p. 211.

<sup>43</sup> Parker 2005 p. 348, n. 91.

<sup>44</sup> Bremmer 2014 p. 9.

individuals connected by shared eschatological, moral and civic beliefs that influenced the public opinion of the Athenian polis in some crucial moments of its history, as we shall observe in chapter 4. Hard contemporary evidence on this issue does not exist, apart perhaps from an observation of Andokides on the composition of the ekklesia.<sup>45</sup> According to Andokides, when the ekklesia was discussing the imminent expedition to Sicily, at the presence of the expedition's generals Nikias, Lamachus and Alkibiades. One Pythonikos then rose and cried that one of the leaders of the dangerous expedition, Alkibiades, had been holding mystic rituals in his home with others, and offered to produce a witness. Alkibiades defended himself vigorously and the Prytanes then decided to clear the meeting of non-initiates, in order to be able to listen to the witness' evidence on the sacred matter of sacrilege against the goddesses. This suggests that the initiates within the ekklesia were not a small crowd, which would have made the deliberations irrelevant, and may have represented a substantial part of the attendees of the ekklesia meetings. Given the fact that the number of attendees in the ekklesia was around 6,000,<sup>46</sup> Andokides' evidence suggests a high number of initiates in the ekklesia, perhaps near its majority. This does not imply the existence of a party of initiates acting in concert in the ekklesia but suggests that intellectually active Athenians may have been at the same time mystic initiates and active participants in the polis' political life.

Thus, the group of new *mystai* and existing *epoptai* may be thought as a sizable minority in the population of the city. One such initiate was the archon

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<sup>45</sup> Andokides *De Mysteriis* 1.11-2.

<sup>46</sup> Hansen 1976 p.122

*eponymos*<sup>47</sup> whose role was to choose authors and plays for the Lenaia and Great Dionysia festivals in the spring of 405.<sup>48</sup> His name was Kallias,<sup>49</sup> and belonged to the *genos* Kerykes, high priests of Demeter's sanctuary at Eleusis, to whom the office of *dadouchos* belonged hereditarily.<sup>50</sup> Other members of the *genos* included Kleokritos, who, according to Xenophon,<sup>51</sup> had accompanied Thrasyboulos in the anti-oligarchic campaign to overthrow of the Thirty and had made a speech inspired by Eleusinian themes to the troops after the battle of Mounichia, a theme we shall observe in 4.4. Kallias was *proxenos* of Sparta, friend of Sokrates and of Alkibiades, host to Plato's *Protagoras* dialogue and to Xenophon's *Symposion*, and later Andokides' adversary in court. His family had a close relationship with the anti-tyrannical *genos* of the Alkmaionids and with Perikles.

Kallias was the son of Hipponikos and Agariste, who belonged to the Alkmaionids *genos* and who later married Perikles: Perikles' sons Paralos and Xanthippos were Kallias' step-brothers.<sup>52</sup> Kallias' sister Hipparete married Alkibiades.<sup>53</sup> As his paternal family leased slaves to the silver mines in Laurion for one mina a day,<sup>54</sup> Kallias inherited a large fortune and was one of the richest

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<sup>47</sup> Cf. Csapo and Slater 1994 p. 105, with sources.

<sup>48</sup> "The year in which there was an eclipse of the moon one evening, and the old temple at Athens was burned, Pythias being now ephor at Sparta and Kallias archon at Athens" Xenophon *Hellenika* 1.6.1. Cf. also the *Constitution of the Athenians* 34.1.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. MacDowell 1962, pp. 10-11. Kallias is often called Kallias III by modern historians to distinguish him from his grandfather Kallias II, and his grandfather's grandfather Kallias I.

<sup>50</sup> Xenophon *Hellenika* 6.3.3.

<sup>51</sup> Xenophon *Hellenika* 6.3.1-6.

<sup>52</sup> Plato *Protagoras* 314e-f, Plutarch *Life of Perikles* 24.5.

<sup>53</sup> Plutarch *Life of Alkibiades* 8.2.

<sup>54</sup> Xenophon *Ways and Means* 4.15. One mina was equal to one hundred drachmae, in a period when the daily pay of a hoplite was one drachma.



men in Athens.<sup>55</sup> Plato calls his house the *prytaneion* of Greece's wisdom, the largest and most prosperous house in Athens.<sup>56</sup> He was, Xenophon writes, Eleusinian *dadouchos* in 371, when he was part of an embassy to negotiate terms of peace with the Spartans.<sup>57</sup> According to Xenophon, Kallias made a speech to the Spartans on an Eleusinian theme. Demeter's mysteries and her gift of grain were common to Athens and Sparta, and therefore war between the two poleis was incompatible with their brotherhood in Demeter's cult. Kallias also pointed out that Triptolemos, his ancestor, had revealed the secret rituals (ἄρρητα ἱερὰ), of the goddesses to Herakles, the mythical founder of Sparta, and to the Dioskouroi, Sparta's citizens (τοῖν ὑμετέροιν πολίταιν), and asked whether it was just for the Spartans to destroy the harvest of those from whom they had first received the seed of grain, and for Athenians not to wish abundance of food for those to whom they had first given the seeds.

To sum it up, Kallias was a complex and somewhat contradictory figure. If one is to judge by his family roots and connections, he was at the same time a wealthy member of the oligarchy, an anti-tyrannical Alkmaionid, and an intellectual, friend of the sophists.<sup>58</sup> His attachment to his priestly role in the Eleusinian cult, his defence of the cult's veneration for peace, his cultural sophistication and his immense wealth he spent as an Athenian Maecenas suggest he was open to new ideas and devoted to Athens' religion and to mystic cults. The same combination of traditional religious and advanced political ideas can be found in *Frogs* and *Bakchai*: it is thus tempting to advance the hypothesis that Kallias' choice of those plays in 405 may have been

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<sup>55</sup> Andokides *De Mysteriis* 130.

<sup>56</sup> Plato *Protagoras* 337d.

<sup>57</sup> Xenophon *Hellenika* 6.3.3-6.

<sup>58</sup> Plato *Apology* 20a.

motivated by politico-religious consideration that he shared with the authors of the plays.

## 2.2 Theatre Audiences

In considering the mystic/political impact *Bakchai* and *Frogs* may have had on their audiences and through them on the polis of Athens at large, we must try to clear the ground on some issues. How large were theatre audiences when compared to the polis' population? How representative of the polis community was a theatre audience at the Lenaia or Great Dionysia festival? Given the gender, religious and political role of women in *Bakchai*, were women present in the audiences? How large was the number of initiates in theatre audiences?

While attendance to theatre performances was open to all, metics, slaves and foreigners,<sup>59</sup> two main factors had a limiting effect on theatre attendance: the price of tickets and the availability of seats. Starting with the price of tickets, a large attendance to public theatrical performances was a priority for the polis. The price of tickets was a politically sensitive issue, so much so that, according to some of our sources, Perikles, with the aim of gaining popularity with the *demos*, had established the practice for the treasury of the polis to purchase tickets and distribute them for free to those in need, a practice called *theorika*.<sup>60</sup> As the date at which two-obols *theorika* became custom is uncertain,<sup>61</sup> only an

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<sup>59</sup> For metics cf. for instance Aristophanes *Acharnians* 501-8; for slaves and foreigners Aristophanes *Peace* 962-7, Plato *Gorgias* 658c-d, Theophrastos *Characters* 9.5, Aelian *Varia Historia* 2.13.

<sup>60</sup> Attested for instance in Plato *Gorgias* 515e; Plutarch *Perikles* 9.1. See Kawalko Roselli 2011 pp. 87-117 for a thorough discussion on the subject.

<sup>61</sup> Kawalko-Roselli 2011 p. 90.

appraisal of its cost in relation of the price of other items gives us an indication on the social inclusivity of theatre performances before the introduction of *theorika*. Two-obols theatre tickets were priced to a level that the majority of Athenians could afford. Two obols were one-third of a drachma, two obols was the cost of two orders of meat stew,<sup>62</sup> of six *kotylai*, of one and a half litres of wine,<sup>63</sup> of a litre of olive oil,<sup>64</sup> of one book sold in the agora,<sup>65</sup> while a piglet each initiated had to offer to Demeter cost eighteen obols, three drachmas.<sup>66</sup> Soldiers and sailors were usually paid half to one drachma a day,<sup>67</sup> three to six obols, while jurors were paid three obols per day, a rate thought sufficient to compensate the juror and his family for daily expenses.<sup>68</sup> As such, the price of tickets allowed most who could afford it, including metics and slaves, to watch the shows performed in the theatre of Dionysos for a relatively affordable price.

We shall now turn on the availability of seats. We have no hard evidence on the capacity of the Theatre of Dionysos other than its extant dimensions and archaeological research on its evolution since archaic times. The outlines of the theatre that we can visit today, spread out on the south-eastern slopes of the rock of the Akropolis, are in fact the ruins of a later version of the theatre, built in marble in the late fourth century in the same place of the old theatre. The theatre was originally built around 500 BC, was rebuilt in the second half of the fifth-century BC at the same time as the construction of the Odeon of Perikles

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<sup>62</sup> Aristophanes *Frogs* 554.

<sup>63</sup> οἶνος cost an *obol* for three κοτύλαι (LSJ).

<sup>64</sup> Plutarch *De Tranquillitate animi* 10.

<sup>65</sup> Plato *Apology* 26de.

<sup>66</sup> Aristophanes *Pax* 375.

<sup>67</sup> Thukydides 6.31.3; 8.45.2. But Xenophon *Hellenika* 1.5 reports that the pay of Spartan and Athenian ship crews was three obols per day.

<sup>68</sup> Aristophanes *Wasps* 300: "With my small pay, I am obliged to buy bread, wood, and stew!".

and then again, some 120 years later. Contemporaries give some estimates on its capacity, such as Plato who in his *Symposion* has Sokrates praise the author and actor Agathon as his wisdom was “shining forth from your youth, strong and splendid, in the eyes of more than thirty thousand Greeks” in the theatre of Dionysos.<sup>69</sup> In his *Ion* however he has the rhapsodist standing “before more than twenty thousand friendly people”<sup>70</sup> in an unnamed space, but likely to be the theatre of Dionysos. Both figures are highly dubious, especially as the term “more than thirty thousand (πλέον ἢ τριμυροί)” may have just been used to define a very large crowd.<sup>71</sup>

Pickard-Cambridge calls the audience capacity of the theatre of Dionysos “by modern standards very large”.<sup>72</sup> During the last forty years his estimate of 14-17,000 available seats has been taken as authoritative, despite the fact that it was based on the foundations of the larger theatre rebuilt by Lykourgos a century later than the one that was used in Perikles’ times. Other scholars share that opinion, such as Csapo and Slater<sup>73</sup> and Wiles.<sup>74</sup> Other estimates are however based on a review of archaeological evidence that suggests a rectangular shaped orchestra and theatre such as the one in Thorikos, covering an area much smaller than the late fourth century one, and able to contain no more than some 3,700 spectators for Dawson,<sup>75</sup> to 5-6,000 or less for Goette and Meineck.<sup>76</sup> Kawalko Roselli includes spectators sitting outside the benches area and

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<sup>69</sup> Plato *Symposion* 175e.

<sup>70</sup> Plato *Ion* 535d.

<sup>71</sup> In that sense Herodotos for example uses it in describing a very large force of mercenaries of the pharaoh Apries (2.163) and the crowd producing a large cloud of dust near Eleusis during the Persian occupation of Attika (8.65.1).

<sup>72</sup> Pickard-Cambridge 1968 p. 263.

<sup>73</sup> Csapo-Slater 1994 pp. 79-80; p. 286.

<sup>74</sup> Wiles, 2000 p. 93.

<sup>75</sup> Dawson 1997 p. 7.

<sup>76</sup> Meineck 2012 p. 26.

reaches the figure of some 8,000.<sup>77</sup> Whatever the capacity of the theatre, demand for seats was high, probably higher than supply. If the estimate of Pickard-Cambridge for the later Lykourgian theatre' capacity is right, it is evidence for the need for the new theatre to accommodate twice as many spectators as it may have done in Perikles' time, even though the population of Athens may have in fact declined,<sup>78</sup> evidence for the popularity of theatre in the polis in the fifth and fourth century.

As we shall observe in chapter 5, the authors of *Bakchai* and *Frogs* express a moral/religious/political message to their audiences. Can we consider theatre audiences as bodies that would credibly transmit those messages to the rest of the polis? What was the social composition of theatre audiences if compared for instance to the official political body of the polis of Athens, the ekklesia? I argue that the inclusivity of theatre audiences allowed the elaboration of discourses on themes that were not discussed in other political and religious venues as well as to address political and self-identity issue of strata of the population that had no public political voice.

The official social and political structure of the polis of Athens was reflected in the way some of the seats were allocated in the theatre of Dionysos, but not all of them.<sup>79</sup> Male full-rights citizens would have been the majority of the seats granted by the polis. The city's archons and members of the Boule were provided with seats free of charge, and the same happened to civic magistrates and officials, foreign ambassadors, distinguished individuals, the high priest of

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<sup>77</sup> Kawalko Roselli 2011 p. 74.

<sup>78</sup> Gomme 1933 p. 47; Strauss 1986 pp. 70-85.

<sup>79</sup> Kawalko Roselli 2011 pp. 78-81.

Dionysos Eleuthereos,<sup>80</sup> and successful generals. But, as mentioned earlier, other groups were present in audiences and widened the range of issues raised and discussed by tragedies and comedies.

Starting with metics, a number of them and their families lived in Piraeus and were active in industrial manufacturing, such as Lysias' father, a large manufacturer of shields for the army.<sup>81</sup> Given their relative wealth and their proximity to the Theatre of Dionysos, they would have been able to pay for their tickets and present in numbers at theatre performances. The conflict between their important role in the economy of Athens and their lack of political voice is attested for instance by Xenophon. In his early fourth-century *Ways and Means* (2) Xenophon makes a plea on behalf of metics resident in Athens.<sup>82</sup> They provide, Xenophon writes, the best source of revenue for the polis as they are self-supporting, do not receive subsidies from the polis and instead contribute to the community welfare and war effort by paying a special tax.<sup>83</sup> As such, Xenophon pleads, they should be encouraged to stay in Athens, and measures should be taken to attract other metics to reside in Athens, such as the right to own land and to serve in the cavalry. Metics can thus be considered to have a natural affinity with an egalitarian and democratic, anti-tyrannical and anti-oligarchic political stance, a stance that Lysias for instance

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<sup>80</sup> Cf. Aristophanes *Frogs* 297.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. Lysias 12.11.

<sup>82</sup> Xenophon wrote *Ways and Means* (Πόροι ἢ περὶ Προσόδων) at the end of his life, around 355, at a time of financial distress for the polis of Athens that may have motivated the appeal, cf. Dillery 1993 p. 1. The contribution of metics to the economy of Athens was likely to have been equally important during the Peloponnesian War, as they manufactured weapons and armoury.

<sup>83</sup> On the importance of metics in Athens' economy cf. for instance Plato *Laws* 850a-d.

shared as he was said to have supplied money, mercenaries and shields to the democratic forces at Phyle (cf. 4.3).<sup>84</sup>

Theatre productions, in both the comedy and tragedy genres, paid particular attention to metics. At the high point of the *Oresteia* trilogy, in the solemn finale of the exodos of *Eumenides* (1028-9), in a sign of the high respect Athenians had for metics, Aeschylus has Athena invite the chorus of *Semnai Theai* to wear purple-dyed garments, such as those ritually worn by metics at the Panathenaia procession. In Aristophanes' plays, metics were an integral part of the polis, yet different from full citizens and in a sense, aliens: for instance he describes metics and citizens as the chaff and the ear of corn,<sup>85</sup> and often imitates in scorn their garbled and mispronounced Greek.<sup>86</sup> In his *Peace* the protagonist Trygaeos addresses the audience to summon all people to help in freeing the goddess Peace from her prison (296-300) and includes among them farmers, merchants, carpenters, craftsmen, metics and foreigners and people from the islands in the Aegean. A few lines later (545-9), it is stated that among the spectators are men involved in industrial production, probably metics (as was the case of Lysias' father and brother): one is a helm crest maker; others were a maker of hoes or mattocks, a blacksmith maker of swords, a maker of sickles, a spear-maker, and a farmer. The passage obviously emphasises those who will suffer most from a state of peace, arms manufacturers, while it invites farmers to go back to their farms and start working again as peace allows them to resume their activities in the fields of Attika. In Aristophanes' *Frogs* the theatre audience is defined twice in opposite ways: as Euripides' spectators, muggers and pickpockets, parricides and burglars (771-2), and as the knowledgeable, literate, intellectually

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<sup>84</sup> Vitae Decem Oratorum 3.

<sup>85</sup> *Acharnians* 508: "τοὺς γὰρ μετοίκους ἄχυρα τῶν ἀστῶν λέγω".

<sup>86</sup> For example, a Scythian archer in *Thesmophoriazousai* 1001-7, in *Birds* a Scythian god, Triballo (1677-81).

sophisticated people watching the play's agon (1109-1118). In the same play Aristophanes makes a radical political plea for metics and slaves to be allowed to have citizens' rights, in a way similar to Xenophon's plea (see 5.10).

Similarly, in *Bakchai* Euripides has Dionysos refer to the cities in which barbarians and Greeks mingle (18), and of barbarians as the first to be initiated in the rituals of Dionysos (482), a possible reference to the non-Greek metics in Athens (further on this point in 5.11).

Despite their numbers, the number of slaves attending the theatre may have been limited. Those working in the fields of Attika or in the mines at Laurion lived often far away from Athens and were poorly paid, if at all. Only the most educated of slaves did attend, some as pedagogues of children, as Theophrastos attests in his description of a shameless man, who takes foreigners and even his children and their (slave) tutor to performances without paying.<sup>87</sup>

Were women among the spectators at theatre performances? This often-debated issue has particular relevance in evaluating the impact of *Bakchai* and *Frogs* upon their audiences. The religious and political content of the plays is centred on the Dionysiac cult (in *Bakchai*), where it is the theme of choral odes of maenads, and on the Demetrian cult (in *Frogs*), where the chorus is composed of women and men Eleusinian initiates. In fact, women played an important and sometimes exclusive role in both cults. Among the evidence for the presence of women in theatre performances listed for instance by Csapo and Slater,<sup>88</sup> two passages of Plato have a particular significance.<sup>89</sup> In *Laws* Plato writes that if anybody in the polis were to be a judge of public artistic performances, children

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<sup>87</sup> Theophrastos *Characters* IX.

<sup>88</sup> Csapo and Slater 1994 pp. 286-305.

<sup>89</sup> Plato's *Laws* 658a-d and *Gorgias* 502b-d in



would give the prize to puppet showmen, older boys to comedy producers, well-educated women, young men and the mass of the public to tragedies,<sup>90</sup> while old men would very likely take most delight in listening to a *rhapsodos* giving a fine recitation of the Iliad or the Odyssey or of a piece from Hesiod. While it establishes a connection between well educated women and tragedy that would be unthinkable if women had not been allowed in the theatre, the passage is still based on the hypothesis of the freedom of choice to all, a freedom that may not have reflected reality.

Much clearer is a passage in *Gorgias*. In Athens, tragic composition (ἡ τῆς τραγωδίας ποίησις), Plato notes, has ceased to be a majestic, awe-inspiring work destined to improving its audiences and has turned to the gratification of spectators. Poetry in theatre has become a kind of popular harangue<sup>91</sup> addressed to men, women, and children, slave and free alike, something we don't like much, Plato's Sokrates observes, as it serves only to flatter the audience. Plato then significantly contrasts theatre audiences in Athens to those in other cities, where it is only composed by free men. Among other admittedly sparse evidence on the presence of women in theatres,<sup>92</sup> of note are Plutarch's observation in a letter to his wife that her simplicity won admiration at religious ceremonies, sacrifices, and theatre performances,<sup>93</sup> while the much later author of *Vitae Aeschyli* (9) mentions miscarriages that happened at the sight of the Erinyes appearing on stage in Aeschylus' *Eumenides*. While this

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<sup>90</sup> "(κρινουῦσι) τραγωδίαν αἵ τε πεπαιδευμένοι τῶν γυναικῶν καὶ τὰ νέα μειράκια καὶ σχεδὸν ἴσως τὸ πλῆθος πάντων"

<sup>91</sup> "δημηγορία ἄρα τίς ἐστὶν ἡ ποιητική".

<sup>92</sup> Particularly the scholion to Aristophanes' *Ekklesiazousai* 22 and Alexis *Gynecocracy* PGF F 42.

<sup>93</sup> Plutarch *Consolatio ad uxorem*, 5.

could have been an apocryphal anecdote, it would have no plausibility if women had been officially excluded from theatre performances.

While arguments for the presence of women in the performances of both tragedies and comedies seem convincing, several scholars have maintained a sceptical position. Perhaps driven by his vision of Athenian democracy, Goldhill for instance puts great emphasis on the function of tragedy in the structure of Athenian democracy as an exclusive male citizen preserve. “The issues of the play are focused firmly through the male, adult, enfranchised perspective ... the Great Dionysia in all sense represents democracy” writes Goldhill.<sup>94</sup> Were theatre audiences a copy of ekklesia meetings? Goldhill thinks so: “as a civic event, the scene in the theatron would be much closer to the Assembly than to the Panathenaia”. As Kawalko Roselli points out, the very theme of the role of women in the polis may well have been “a bone of contention” on a disputed issue, that of the danger to democracy in Athens posed by mass theatre audiences that included women, slaves, foreigners, and metics.<sup>95</sup> Mired as it is in our modern views of women’s role in society and our preconceptions on Greek history and society, involving what Kawalko Roselli calls our “drastic simplification of ancient culture”, the issue is complex and perhaps in need of a radical redefinition of the role of women in Athens’ public and private life. In Goldhill’s words, “if citizen women did walk through the streets, sit in the theatre, watch plays, be watched, walk home, much modern writing on the role of women in the *oikos* and polis would need a new emphasis”.<sup>96</sup> I believe that my reading of *Bakchai* and *Frogs* supports Henderson’s vision, as he writes that, as theatre audiences were so much larger

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<sup>94</sup> Goldhill 1994 pp. 367-368.

<sup>95</sup> Kawalko Roselli 2011 p. 193-4.

<sup>96</sup> Goldhill 1994 p. 368.

than ekklesia meetings, “in theatre, citizen males may have been surrounded, perhaps even outnumbered, by the ‘others’ on whose behalf they ran the polis”.<sup>97</sup>

We shall start by briefly examining the role of women in some aspects of Greek religion such as mystic rituals, as it helps establishing the role of women in Greek society and supports the presence of women in theatre audiences. Greek civilisation was certainly patriarchal, where women’s freedom, civic rights were strictly limited and political rights non-existent. Religious rituals however gave women a wider public space than political spaces did.<sup>98</sup> While women priestesses had an important role in the Eleusinian festival to Demeter and Persephone,<sup>99</sup> some festivals in the cult of Demeter and Persephone were famously exclusive to women.<sup>100</sup> The Thesmophoria Demetrian festival for instance was reserved for the female community, a prohibition mentioned by Aristophanes in *Thesmophoriazousai* where the chorus of women celebrating the Thesmophoria invoke Demeter and Persephone to come to their precinct where men are forbidden to watch the initiation rituals (1148-1154). Narrated only in one late source,<sup>101</sup> the Athenian festival of the *Haloa* was another space for rituals reserved to women. It is of interest as it was a festival jointly dedicated to Demeter, Persephone and Dionysos, and coincided with the tasting of wine that had been kept in storage and with the celebration of the myth of Ikarios and the adoption of Dionysiac rituals in Athens.<sup>102</sup> Evidence thus points to Athenian women playing a primary role in the rituals of Dionysos, such as their

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<sup>97</sup> Henderson 1991 p. 143.

<sup>98</sup> Cf. Parker 2005 pp. 270-289.

<sup>99</sup> Cf. Clinton 1974 pp. 1-143.

<sup>100</sup> Cf. Pausanias 4.17.1 for the exclusive feminine cult of Demeter in Lakonia.

<sup>101</sup> A scholion to Lucian *Dialogi Meretricii* VII.4.

<sup>102</sup> For a discussion of the myth of Ikarios see for instance Csapo 1997 p. 267.

role of maenads, well attested both in Athens and throughout the Greek world.<sup>103</sup>

Among existing evidence, abundant iconographic evidence attests to the cultic close and nearly exclusive association between Dionysos and women, whether nymphs, maenads or worshippers. Women, Parker writes, “were the god’s privileged congregation”.<sup>104</sup> In Carpenter’s vast list of images, Dionysos is always accompanied by women, and nearly never by men, but only by satyrs, phallic caricatures of men.<sup>105</sup> For instance, some of the so-called Lenaia vases show groups of women drawing wine out of large vessels into smaller ones, a scene that could refer either to a scene from the *Khoes* day of the Anthesteria, or from Dionysiac celebrations at the Lenaia festivals.<sup>106</sup> Dillon analyses them in conjunction with two other vases. One is a red-figure stamnos attributed to the Villa Giulia painter, now in Boston,<sup>107</sup> where women dressed in plissé *peploi*, drawing wine from a crater before a statue of Dionysos, while the second is a red-figure cup by the painter Macron, now in Berlin,<sup>108</sup> that shows women, similarly well-dressed but with hair falling on their shoulders, dancing in ecstasy, playing *auloi*, and shaking *thyrsoi* in the company of the god in Bakchic revelry scenes, elements common to Dionysiac scenes in ancient Greek iconography. Whatever the ritual or the festival the vases refer to, they are evidence for the close and exclusive ritual relationship between women and the god Dionysos, and the absence of men from the scenes confirms the exclusivity

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<sup>103</sup> Maenadism was not limited to Attika but was a ritual common to the whole Greek world. Cf. Henrichs 1978 pp. 121-160, and Bremmer 1984 pp. 267-286.

<sup>104</sup> Parker 2005 p. 324.

<sup>105</sup> Carpenter 1997 pp. 52-69. See also Parker 2005 pp. 306-312.

<sup>106</sup> Dillon 2002 p. 149-152.

<sup>107</sup> Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, inv. 90.155.

<sup>108</sup> Antiken sammlung Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, inv. 2290.

of that relationship. Even in the male dominated (and “remarkably women-unfriendly” as Parker calls it)<sup>109</sup> Anthesteria Dionysiac festival of new wine bears some traces of an ancient, special ritual role reserved to a noble Athenian woman, the wife of the king-archon. Accompanied by a group of fourteen mature women she would proceed to a royal palace called the *Boukoleion*, near the *Prytaneion*, and there became affianced to the god in the effigy of an archaic wooden statue.<sup>110</sup>

To sum this up: we noted that women played a pre-eminent role in both Athenian mystic cults. As we shall observe in 5.2, the two worships shared several characteristics, one of which was the active role of women in the performance of rituals. Women were free to attend the high point of Demeter’s cult, the initiation rituals at her festival in Eleusis, whose priestesses were women. It is thus highly unlikely that women were barred from attending the high point of the Athenian festival of Dionysos, the theatre performances at the god’s theatre. To turn to *Bakchai* and *Frogs*, in both plays the role of women is intentional and fundamental: in *Bakchai* as the maenads who execute the tyrant and recreate the cohesion of the polis, in *Frogs* as an explicit part of the god-blessed *thiasos* (165-6) and composing the choruses of women and girls dancing in honour of Demeter (445-448).

Secondly, the two playwrights were aiming at the whole polis in their political messages, not only at an audience exclusively composed by enfranchised male citizens as Goldhill believes, but one that includes not only women, but metics

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<sup>109</sup> Parker 2005 p. 321.

<sup>110</sup> *Constitution of the Athenians* 3.5 “τοῦ βασιλέως γυναικὸς ἡ σύμμεξις ἐνταῦθα γίγνεται τῷ Διονύσῳ καὶ ὁ γάμος” The term σύμμεξις has no sexual implications: it simply designates the ceremonial meeting of the partners before marriage, cf. Rhodes 1981 pp. 104-105, Dillon 2002 p. 102, n. 190.

and slaves as well. As we shall note in 5.9-11, Euripides in *Bakchai* and Aristophanes in *Frogs* plea for the polis to be reconstructed along similar mystic moral and civic egalitarian lines. The two plays are symmetrical in their political aims, to adopt the moral and religious beliefs of the mass of ordinary people in expressed for instance in *Bakchai* 422-431 and to extend citizenship to all who had fought in the Athenian fleet in *Frogs* 700-703. The plays' political content and the way it is expressed would have been markedly different if aimed at audiences exclusively composed of full-rights citizens, while the absence of women, of metics and slaves in the audience would have made the plays' political message less significant and less pressing than it is. In other words, in *Bakchai* and *Frogs* the collective cohesion of the *thiasoi* prefigures that of the polis-to-be and mirrors the communal feeling of an audience gender and socially inclusive. As we shall observe further in 5.9, this expresses powerfully the role of the chorus in its interrelationship with the audience and the polis.

Thirdly, by their reference to mystic cults Euripides and Aristophanes expressed two examples of egalitarian and inclusive worship with which their audiences would have been conversant. This would apply not only to the mass of the public, familiar with the mystic cults' public rituals, but particularly to the initiates, who were present in numbers at tragic performances, as for instance Herakleides Pontikos relates.<sup>111</sup> Aeschylus risked being lynched on stage by the audience who suspected him of having divulged some of the mysteries' secrets in one of his plays and had to take refuge at the altar of Dionysos to save his life. Perhaps apocryphal, but one that Aristotle too refers to, as he relates that Aeschylus was later summoned to defend himself in front of the Areopagos and declared in his argument that that he was not aware "that

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<sup>111</sup> Herakleides Pontikos fr. 170 (Wehrli).

the matter was a secret".<sup>112</sup> The experience of initiation and *epopteia*, their sharing of mystic and civic values, may have made the number of initiates sufficient to influence the success of the play by applauding or booing plays and by swaying its judges.<sup>113</sup> It is thus tempting to imagine that the initiates in the audience may have had an influence on the first prize awarded to *Frogs* and *Bakchai*.

To sum it up, I argue that the audiences of drama, comedies and dithyrambs in Athens at the end of the fifth century were socially inclusive, even though the price of theatre tickets excluded the poor. Audiences were also composed of mystic initiates in sizable numbers. Women would have also been present, perhaps not many, given the restrictions on their movements outside their homes. Audiences were not composed of passive spectators but were an essential active component of the collective phenomenon of theatre performances and of their success. The way in which audiences perceived their experience is the subject of the next section.

## 2.3 Theatrical Perception.

The combination of mystic and civic values principally expounded by the choruses in *Bakchai* and *Frogs* (see 5.9-10) implies their political relevance in the plays' political context (see 5.11), the polis of Athens in the last year of the Peloponnesian War (see 4.3). The effectiveness of the political plea of Euripides and Aristophanes on the political opinion of the polis depended on the way

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<sup>112</sup> Arist. *Ethica Nicomachaea* 3.2.111.

<sup>113</sup> Cf. for instance Plato *Laws* 659 a-c.

Athenian audiences absorbed, interrelated with, and reacted to performances in theatre. In 2.1 and 2.2 we established the presence of numbers of mystic initiates in theatre audiences, which is relevant in the context of the mystic content of *Bakchai* and *Frogs*. In this chapter we shall try to widen that exploration into the way the Athenians defined their perception of theatre performances. While Aristotle's treatment of the theme is the main evidence we shall examine, we shall start by assessing firstly the difficulty for modern scholars to approach this issue, and secondly the evidence given by Gorgias, Plato and Aristotle on the way the author, the audience, the chorus, and the actors built a common dramatic/mystic/political discourse in the theatre. The argument we shall develop is that the language patterns these authors use in their analysis are evidence for the emotional response to public theatre performances being considered as akin to a religious experience such as a mystic initiation. From this point of view the depth of the communal experience of spectators can be better appreciated, and would shed light on the relationship between authors, choruses and audience, an essential component of the dramatic structure of *Bakchai* and *Frogs*.

Some scholars have noted the difficulty of approaching the theme of how contemporary audiences perceived theatre performances, given the paucity of ancient evidence. Sourvinou-Inwood for instance rightly focuses on the issue of modern reading of ancient perception of theatre performances as modern readers are mired in modern "rational" perceptual filters, vitiated also by the traditional "rationalistic" reading of Aristotle's *Poetics*.<sup>114</sup> Scholars such as Seaford<sup>115</sup> and Kowalzig<sup>116</sup> for instance, have correctly treated the subject in the

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<sup>114</sup> Sourvinou-Inwood 1989 pp. 134-148 and Sourvinou-Inwood 2003 in particular pp. 1-66.

<sup>115</sup> Seaford 2013 pp. 261-280.



wider context of the general theme of the chorus as expression of the religious and political collective essence of the city and of the role of aetiological myths in the building of self-identity of Greek poleis.

Let me start by stating the obvious. The experience of Athenian spectators was very different from our own, a factor that may unconsciously distort our reading of the Greek tragic texts and our imaginary reconstruction of their public performances. Even in the confines of physical evidence, the emotional experience of theatre attendance was an individual and collective happening of an intensity that is difficult for us to appreciate. Our theatres are conceived to attract and entertain every day small groups of people for a limited time in the darkness of a hall. While smaller-scale theatrical performances, dithyrambs and public performances by *rhapsodoi* were common and frequent both in Athens and in the towns of Attika, Athenians would assemble once a year for the Great Dionysia in their thousands, in the open, after a series of processions, sacrifices and acts of worship, and sit for four or five days from dawn to dusk at performances of dithyrambs, tragedies, satyr-plays and comedies in honour of Dionysos.<sup>117</sup> This would imply mass participation of a large portion of the polis (see 2.2) to a collective ritual of high emotional impact not only for individuals, but for the communal feeling it would create.

The visual experience of audiences would also have been very different from ours. The field of vision of a modern audience is limited to well-lit action on the stage in a dark hall. In the open air, Athenian audiences would have felt the presence at their back of the rocky south side of the Akropolis and of Athena's

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<sup>116</sup> Kowalzig 2007.

<sup>117</sup> The order and number of performances is controversial, cf. Csapo & Slater 1994 p. 107.

sanctuary high above them, while to their left were the walls of the Odeion, the magnificent public hall built by Perikles. In front of them, above the stage, was the view of the bay of Piraeus, where the Aegean Sea opened its ways to Athenians sailors, the πόντος with all its religious, economic and political implications. In space terms, audiences were thus at the physical, cultural and symbolic centre of their community, of its deities and rituals, of its communal civic and political spirit, while performing a religious ritual that was the acme of the festival of Dionysos. While modern theatre goers maintain a safe psychological distance from the action on scene and keep their religious feeling separate from their day-to-day life, tragedy was perceived by fifth-century audiences as “a ritual performance, (where) deities and other religious elements were perceived to be religious realities”.<sup>118</sup> In other words, Athenian audiences would have considered their perceptual universe in the theatre as composed of the re-enactment of Greece’s mythological past, of the here-and-now presence of divinity, and of the moral, civic and political issues that the plays presented to the polis and to individuals. The evidence we shall examine suggests that for the Athenians the participation in theatre performances was akin to an act of collective worship, a ritual in which the divine would interact with each of performance’s constituents, the author, the chorus, the actors and the audience, and in which each constituent interacts with each other. In this context, it is significant that in the authors we shall consider the emotional experience of spectators of public performance is expressed in terms that echo the experience of mystic initiation.

We shall firstly examine Gorgias’ famous fragment dedicated to the power of human language in his *Encomium of Helen*. In his peroration in favour of

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<sup>118</sup> Sourvinou-Inwood 2003 p. 1.

mythological Helen, victim of the powers of the Paris' seductive language, Gorgias interestingly focuses on the power of public poetry readings over listeners because of its supernatural power (9-10). The element emphasised by Gorgias is the power of music as a psychotropic medium, an important element in our analysis of *Bakchai* and *Frogs* (see 5.9). All poetry, writes Gorgias, is a speech in rhythm (λόγος ἔχων μέτρον); music and words cause in listeners the same fearful shuddering (φοβική περίφοβος), tearful pity (ἔλεος πολύδακρυς), and a feeling of mourning and longing (πόθος φιλοπενθήας) as people empathise with the good fortunes and disasters of other people. Compassion and longing can be transformed by the power of songs, as divinely-inspired songs (αἱ ἔνθεοι ἐπωιδαί) are bearers of pleasure (ἐπαγωγοὶ ἡδονῆς) and banishers of pain (ἀπαγωγοὶ λύπης).

The passage establishes the notion of the supernatural power of poetry and music to both inspire fear and compassion and to cure them. Some notes are necessary on the terms Gorgias uses. The term “shuddering”, φοβική, has religious connotations as it marks the awe, the shivering fear felt in the presence of the divine, as we shall note was for instance the case of Miltiades facing the deity on the island of Paros (see 3.4). With its cognate verb φοβίττειν is often used in initiation rituals<sup>119</sup> and often defines the thrill and terror of numinous or supernatural sights in Greek literature.<sup>120</sup> The ἐπωιδαί are ἔνθεοι, “full of god”, “god-inspired”, “possessed”, a term we shall also encounter in Plato's definition of poetry<sup>121</sup> further in this section, while the terms φόβος and ἔλεος

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<sup>119</sup> Cf. Seaford 2009 pp. 406-414 and Cairns 2016 pp. 2-7.

<sup>120</sup> For instance, Sophokles *Elektra* 1402, *Oedipos Tyrannus* 1306, Plato *Phaedrus* 251a, Aristophanes *Frogs* 1336, Aristotle *Poetics*, 1453b, Plutarch *Life of Aratus* 32.1-2 etc.

<sup>121</sup> Plato *Ion* 533d-536d

are also significantly the negative emotions that drama creates in their audiences in Aristotle's famous definition of tragedy.<sup>122</sup>

Plato expands this concept into a new, wider and more radical theory.<sup>123</sup> Before banning poets and tragedians from his ideal *polis* in his *Republic* (595a-b), Plato had in his youth written "poems, first dithyrambs, afterwards lyric poems and tragedies"<sup>124</sup> and had therefore experience of creating and performing poetry and drama for a public and of evaluating the public's reaction. In *Ion* (533d-536d), Plato's thoughts on the power of poetry and music run along lines similar to Gorgias as he emphasises the divine inspiration of poets. The connection between the divine, the poet, the audience, the chorus and the actors is compared to a circle of magnetic powers emanating from the divine. In his exploration of the reason for Ion's excellence in his art as *rhapsodos*, Plato has Sokrates define it as a divine power (θεία δὲ δύναμις), and compares it to a magnet, as a stone that has the power to attract iron rings and to have them attract other rings. The Muse in the same way fills poets with divinity (ἐνθέους ποιεῖ), and from them a divine inspiration attracts and is attracted by others in a connected magnetic chain: the spectator (ὁ θεατῆς), the *rhapsodos*, the theatre actor (ῥαψωδὸς καὶ ὑποκριτής), and a chain of choral performers and masters and under-masters (ὄρμαθὸς χορευτῶν καὶ διδασκάλων καὶ ὑποδιδασκάλων). The use of the terms ὑποκριτής, χορευτής, διδάσκαλος suggests that Plato may have associated the divine magnetic ring to the performing arts in general, such as dithyrambs, dramatic choruses and tragedy performances.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Aristotle *Poetics* 1447a.

<sup>123</sup> P. Murray 1997, p. 114 calls the "notion of *enthousiasmós* which Plato introduces here (as) strikingly new."

<sup>124</sup> Diogenes Laërtios *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* 3.5.

<sup>125</sup> As he does for instance in *Republic* 373b.

In public performances of poetry, the role of music is central to Plato's vision, and similar to Gorgias'. When lyric poets (οἱ μελοποιοί), in whatever poetic genre they express themselves (ὁ μὲν διθυράμβους, ὁ δὲ ἐγκώμια, ὁ δὲ ὑπορχήματα, ὁ δ' ἔπη, ὁ δ' ἰάμβους) enter into the world of harmony and rhythm (εἰς τὴν ἁρμονίαν καὶ εἰς τὸν ῥυθμόν), they abandon their senses as Korybantes,<sup>126</sup> and revel in the frenzy of Dionysos, possessed by the god (βακχεύουσι καὶ κατεχόμενοι) (533e-534b). As the maenads draw honey and milk from rivers, so do poets as they bring like bees to their audiences the honey they cull from springs in Muses' gardens and glades, possibly a reference to Euripides' *Bakchai*.<sup>127</sup> As we shall observe in greater detail in 5.9 when addressing the issue of the role of *aulos* music in *Bakchai* and *Frogs*, Plato associates Dionysiac music with mystic rituals of initiation. In *Symposion* for instance, Plato again refers to the music of the *aulos*, the Dionysiac musical instrument par excellence, in its powerful impact on the listener.<sup>128</sup> Whether played by an excellent artist or by the humblest girl performer, it bewitches (ἐκλήλει) men, and has no equal in being able through its divine nature (διὰ τὸ θεῖα) to cause divine possession and to reveal those who are in need to approach divinity and initiation rituals (τῶν θεῶν καὶ τελετῶν δεομένοι).

A series of not dissimilar concepts appears in Aristotle's *Poetics*. In his famous definition of tragedy (1449b 20ff.) Aristotle emphasises the effect of music as Plato does, as tragedy uses a language enriched (ἡδυσμένος λόγος) with rhythm and melody (ῥυθμός καὶ ἁρμονία). Through these means tragedy creates its effect on the audience: through piety and fear (δι' ἐλέου καὶ φόβου)

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<sup>126</sup> The deity Korybantes would revel in honour of was Kybele, as *Bakchai*'s Asian chorus does, cf. *Bakchai* 78-80.

<sup>127</sup> Cf. Euripides *Bakchai* 142, 704.

<sup>128</sup> Plato *Symposion* 215c.

of the audience it accomplishes a *katharsis* of these emotions (τῶν τοιούτων παθημάτων κάθαρσις).<sup>129</sup> Further on in his analysis of tragedy, (1453b) horror and pity arise from the spectacle (τὸ φοβερόν καὶ ἐλεεινὸν ἐκ τῆς ὄψεως γίγνεσθαι), and the plot by itself can make its hearer shudder with horror and pity (φρίττειν καὶ ἐλεεῖν), where Aristotle uses the term for divinely inspired “shudder” we saw Gorgias and Plato employed.

The exegesis of the notion of *katharsis* in this passage of Aristotle has produced a wide range of conflicting interpretations.<sup>130</sup> The semantic field of the term “*katharsis*” is vast and may have been chosen by Aristotle because of “its range and reference to a wide area of psycho-physical responses”.<sup>131</sup> The meaning of the term concerns primarily ritual and religious impurity.<sup>132</sup> Aristotle uses it in the sense of religious ritual: in *Poetics* the term appears only twice, the first in the passage we are examining, and the second in mentioning Orestes’ ritual cleansing from the pollution caused by his slaying of his mother (1455b 15).<sup>133</sup> As Segal correctly points out, “Greek tragedies often direct the emotional response of the audience towards a resolution in a spirit of community and continuity ... Aristotle may have felt the affinity between that the emotions of group participation in rituals and the emotions of an audience gripped by the painful events in a tragedy”.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Aristotle treats this subject also in his notes on the psychological effect of music in *Politics* 1341b-1342a, using again the same terms of fear and piety as effect of public performances.

<sup>130</sup> A list in Halliwell 1986 appendix 5.

<sup>131</sup> Segal 1996 p. 155.

<sup>132</sup> “Cleansing from guilt or defilement, purification” is the definition in LSJ, while Chantraine 1968 pp. 478-9 defines *katharós* as «propre, pur (dit de l’eau), nettoyé, vanné, (du grain), employé au sens moral ou religieux. La pureté religieuse se trouvant d’ailleurs associée à la propreté du corps.»

<sup>133</sup> Orestes declaration in Aeschylus *Eumenides* 276-8 connects purification rituals with *euphemia*: « ἐγὼ διδάχθεις ἐν κακοῖς ἐπίσταμαι πολλοὺς καθαροὺς, καὶ λέγειν ὅπου δίκη σιγᾶν θ’ ὁμοίως. »

<sup>134</sup> Segal 1996 pp. 149-172.

*Katharsis* is connected with mystic initiation on one side and with civic virtues on the other. The term appears in the parodos of *Bakchai* (73-77) linked to the Dionysiac cult, where the chorus of Asian maenads sing a *makarismos* to the initiate who is pure in life (βιοτὰν ἀγιστεύει) and performs Bacchic rituals with holy purifications (ὁσίοις καθαρμοῖσιν), two concepts that are at the centre of the play's theme of religious purity and civic virtue (see 5.10). In Plato's passage in *Phaedo* (69c) for instance, the mystic eschatological link between *katharsis* and a blissful afterlife is clear: *katharsis* is what those who established the mysteries meant by saying that whoever goes uninitiated and unsanctified (ἀμύητος καὶ ἀτέλεστος) to the other world will lie in the mire (ἐν βορβόρῳ). Only he who arrives there purified and initiated (ὁ δὲ κεκαθαρμένος τε καὶ τετελεσμένος) will dwell with the gods. *Katharsis* in Plato is on the other hand also directly associated with the concept of truth and with those mystic and civic values (ἡ σωφροσύνη καὶ ἡ δικαιοσύνη καὶ ἀνδρεία) that are a kind of purification (69c),<sup>135</sup> concepts we encountered in 1.1 as values of the initiate.

It is interesting to note the continuity of the concepts and terms used by Gorgias, Plato and Aristotle in describing the psychological effect of being a spectator of public readings of poetry accompanied by music and of tragedies as a form of connection to the divine. The experience of the spectator who empathises with the misfortunes narrated on the stage may be compared with that of the uninitiated in the near-death phase of mystic initiation as described by Plutarch in fr. 178 (see 1.1). Aristotle's piety and fear (ἐλέος καὶ φόβος),<sup>136</sup> horror and pity (τὸ φοβερόν καὶ ἐλεεινόν) echo Plutarch's description of the

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<sup>135</sup> "τὸ δ' ἀληθές τῷ ὄντι ἢ καθαρός τις τῶν τοιούτων πάντων καὶ ἡ σωφροσύνη καὶ ἡ δικαιοσύνη καὶ ἀνδρεία, καὶ αὐτὴ ἢ φρόνησις μὴ καθαρός τις ἢ."

<sup>136</sup> Aristotle *Poetics* 1449b 20ff.

terrors of the initiand,<sup>137</sup> while the *katharsis* produced by theatre performances may be compared to the great light and bliss the mystic initiate feels after his rebirth in Plutarch.

Gorgias' definition of the magic power of public readings of poetry accompanied by music, Plato's divine magnet metaphor in *Ion* and Aristotle's definition of theatre performances as *katharsis* are powerful notions that help us in reconstructing what the Athenians felt as the impact of drama and comedy on audiences. In theatre, thousands spectators would then share the same reactions in their deepest emotional ramifications, creating what Wiles calls "an osmosis passing through the bodies of the spectators".<sup>138</sup> Following Plato's cue we may be then tempted to compare the experience of the individual spectator of drama, part of a community of spectators in a magnetic chain of reactions, sentiments and feelings, to the *mystai* in their hundreds undergoing the intense individual and collective experience of initiation fuelled by the presence of hundreds *epoptai*.

## 2.4 Chorus and audience

In *Frogs* and *Bakchai* the mystic *thiasoi*/choruses play a central role in the religious and political addresses to the audience (see 5.9). In this section I shall try and analyse this issue in a larger context. What was the psychological and emotional interrelationship between the chorus and the audience? How did Athenian audiences emotionally react to choral songs and dances?

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<sup>137</sup> Aristotle *Poetics* 1453b.

<sup>138</sup> Wiles 2000 p. 112.



Two recent contributions to the exploration of the theme of the interrelationship between choral performances and the polis are of relevance. In her 2007 seminal works on choral music and dancing in Greek culture,<sup>139</sup> Kowalzig explores in detail the connection between myth and communal rituals, choral music and Greek society, religion and choral performance, aetiology and ritual, but somehow overlooks the nature of the connection between audiences and theatrical performances and the specific political role of the interaction between them. Seaford in his 2013 work on the subject of politics, dancing and singing of the mystic chorus,<sup>140</sup> convincingly argues that choral activity was connected on one hand with the arousal of ecstasy and the experience of cosmic interconnection, and on the other on its expressing a communal political action, in what Seaford defines as a contrast between autocratic individuals and the solidarity and cohesion of the chorus, a pattern we shall observe in *Bakchai* (see 5.10). Seaford establishes an association between public choral performances, initiates-only ritual choruses, dithyrambs and examines briefly the possibility that the chorus may have been a “bridge between mystic secrecy and public display”,<sup>141</sup> but regrettably does not explore the way in which the chorus constitutes along with the audience a single body politic, with mystic values as a common, civic and religious discourse between chorus, audience and the polis.

Going back to Aristotle’s *Poetics*, it is interesting to note the direct emotional link Aristotle establishes between audience and chorus, between music, songs, dancing and the spectators. While affirming the fundamental role of the plot in

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<sup>139</sup> Kowalzig 2007, particularly pp. 1-55 and 392-401, and Kowalzig 2007a pp. 221-254.

<sup>140</sup> Seaford 2013 pp. 261-279.

<sup>141</sup> Seaford 2013 p. 264.

guiding emotionally the public through reversals and recognitions (1450a 35), Aristotle stresses the primary role the chorus played, as he affirms that, after the plot, characters, diction and thought, spectacle and music (ὄψις καὶ μελοποιία) are the fundamental elements of tragedy. Lyric poetry (μελοποιία) is the greatest adornment (ἡδυσμα) of tragedy (1450a 5-10). Aristotle's uses the term ἡδυσμα, "relish, seasoning, sauce" (L&S) to define the role of the visual and musical elements of tragedy versus the action on scene. Some of Aristotle's translators render those terms as "ornament" (Fyfe) and "embellishment" (Halliwell) but miss the term's full implications. The metaphor belongs to the world of Greek food and cooking. Greek base food was rough and tasteless: mostly unsalted gruels of coarse ground grains such as barley or wheat and/or bread, mostly made of barley. It would have been virtually inedible without an accompanying serving of some sort: salt, olives, cooked vegetables or fish, as essential part of a meal as bread and wine: the ἡδυσμα. Thus, far from being an accessory to action and dialogue, Aristotle's expression implies that the music played by the dancing choruses and by the *auletai*, dancing, music and songs, i.e. the choral lyric odes, were separate but integral components of tragedy, without which the mere action and dialogue of actors would have had little impact (1450b 15). The role of the chorus must be regarded as important as that of actors, an integral part of the whole performance and of the action (μόριον εἶναι τοῦ ὅλου καὶ συναγωνίζεσθαι) (1456a 25).

Scholars have been debating the role of the chorus in tragedy for years, but only recently has "the chorus begun to be given its due recognition not only at the centre of any attempt to understand drama in its original context but as a major form of Greek cultural, social and religious life".<sup>142</sup> *Choreia*, "the practice of

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<sup>142</sup> Wilson 2000 p. 5.

dancing and singing as a social collective to the words and music of a poet”,<sup>143</sup> was an important part of life for young Athenians of means. The great number of artists needed to fill the choruses each year was only possible by the Athenian cult of *mousikē*, that “seamless complex of instrumental music, poetic word and coordinated physical movement”<sup>144</sup> that played a central part in Greek *paideia*. Apart from their primary role in the performances at the Great Dionysia, choruses played during other religious festivals, such as the Thargelia festival for Apollo, the Panathenaia, the festival at Delphi and Delos, and torch-races between the *phylai* for Athena, Prometheus and Hephaistos; a triarchic regatta from the Piraeus to Cape Sounion; phyletic banquets; the superintendence by noble Athenian girls of the weaving of the great *peplos* of Athena etc.<sup>145</sup>

How representative of the polis’ social composition were choruses? Apart from membership of tragic choruses being restricted to Athenian adult citizens, it was probably widened at the Lenaia to include boys and metics, but we have little or no evidence on their composition or their principle of representation.<sup>146</sup> We shall then try to establish an answer in terms of the *polis*’ demography in line with what we have done in researching the popularity of theatre performances and initiations in Athens. Revermann in an interesting study on Athenian theatre audiences,<sup>147</sup> estimates that the polis needed annually some 1,200 chorus members for its theatrical performances, including dithyrambs, half of whom would have needed to be adult, Athenian citizens and the rest

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<sup>143</sup> Wilson 2000 p. 1.

<sup>144</sup> Murray and Wilson 2004 p. 1.

<sup>145</sup> Wilson 2000 p. 21.

<sup>146</sup> Wilson 2000 p. 22.

<sup>147</sup> Revermann 2006 p. 99-124.

boys. The majority of chorus members staffed the choruses of dithyrambs as boys, and that experience may have constituted useful training for choruses of tragedies and comedies. A part of the population in Athens would have had direct experience from the earliest age of being part of a chorus in public performances, would have spent months in preparing the performances to be held at the various religious festivals and in rehearsing instrument playing, singing and dancing. This in turn implies that a part of the audiences would have been familiar with the experience of chorus performance: as Revermann notes, the impact of drama, comedy and dithyrambs on audiences can only be appreciated on the basis of the fact that some spectators had been performers themselves. "As anyone who has ever acted himself or herself will confirm, this experience fundamentally shapes how theatre is viewed, perceived, and eventually evaluated as a spectator ... Performing in the orchestra provides a feel for... the dynamics of actor-audience interaction and the difficulties of winning and sustaining the interest of large audiences".<sup>148</sup>

The interaction between chorus and audience thus proves to be more complex than may have been thought. The audience, far from being a motley crowd of unconnected individuals passively watching theatre performances, may have been largely composed of people who had a direct experience of collective dancing, singing and playing music, a group of people "a high proportion of which would also have joined *en masse* to make crucial decisions in assembly and lawcourts".<sup>149</sup> Among them, there would have been a number of mystic Dionysiac and Eleusinian initiates. Choruses and audiences would then be relatively homogeneous constituents of the collectivity of the

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<sup>148</sup> Revermann 2006 p. 112.

<sup>149</sup> Seaford 2000 pp. 31-32.

polis. They would have shared an experience in the performing arts, participation in the collective taking of political and judicial decisions and in religious and civic ceremonies, of which the Dionysiac choruses in tragedy are just one example, in the life-changing emotions of mystic initiation, and sharing the same intellectual sophistication of Aristophanes' audiences.<sup>150</sup> Athenian audiences may thus be thought as representing an influential group of people in the polis, a medium between theatre performances and public opinion, between drama and political decisions in the *ekklesia*, a factor that should be taken into account when interpreting the religious and political content of *Bakchai* and *Frogs* (see 5.11).

### 3 Mystic and Civic Values Prior to the Peloponnesian War

The close association of religious, civic and political concepts is a significant constituent of the development of Athenian political consciousness. In this chapter I shall analyse three episodes that are related to the early association between mystery cults and the community: the legend of Epimenides and his ritual purification of the polis of Athens, and two episodes in Herodotos that are evidence for the interrelation of the cult of Demeter with her community: Miltiades' breach of the goddess' precinct in Paros, and the pacification of the polis of Gela put into effect by the Demetrian *hierophant* Telines. I shall also analyse the association between mystery cults' values and the development of communal civic and political values in Athens in two texts, the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, the text that establishes the *aition* of the Eleusinian mystic initiation

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<sup>150</sup> Cf. Aristophanes' *Frogs* 1109-1118.

cult, and Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, the trilogy that narrates the *aitia* of Athens' judicial system and of the cult of the *Semnai Theai*.

### 3.1 Kylon, Epimenides and the Initiation of the Polis

The episode of Kylon's failed attempted coup and its repercussions is reported by several Greek authors in ways that evidence the combination of mystic elements in the *aitia* of civic history that developed into Athens' religious and civic ideology. The theme of *stasis*, the civic strife that divided Athens in the aftermath of the episode, together with its cure, mystic purification, is a theme common to some of them, and one that we shall observe also at the centre of the political content of *Bakchai* and *Frogs*.

The tale of Kylon's attempted coup may have been in origin a historical event and various versions of the traditional tale have survived. It was mentioned for instance by Herodotos,<sup>151</sup> Thukydides,<sup>152</sup> Plato,<sup>153</sup> by the author of the *Constitution of the Athenians*,<sup>154</sup> Plutarch<sup>155</sup> and Diogenes Laërtios.<sup>156</sup> The episode came to be part of the body of aetiological tales that animated the Athenian view of the origins of the polis and of its civic spirit. There are contradictions between these authors on the date of the episode:<sup>157</sup> while the historical Kylon had achieved a victory at Olympia in 640, in Herodotos the date of the coup is

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<sup>151</sup> Herodotos 5.71-2.

<sup>152</sup> Thukydides 1.126.

<sup>153</sup> Plato *Laws* 1.642d

<sup>154</sup> *Constitution of Athenians* 1.1-2.3, 5.2-11.1.

<sup>155</sup> Plutarch *Life of Solon* 12.

<sup>156</sup> Diogenes Laërtios *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, 10.

<sup>157</sup> For a discussion on the dating of the episode see Rhodes 1981 pp.79-83.

“before the time of Peisistratos”, in Thukydides it happened “in former generations”, in Plato the coming of Epimenides happened ten years before the Persian War, in the *Constitution of the Athenians* towards the late seventh century, while Plutarch associates the episode with Solon, that is, to the 590’s, and Diogenes Laërtios to the 46<sup>th</sup> Olympiad, that is, in 595. The versions vary significantly in the actions they recount and in their ethical and religious content, but some significant elements recur and are worth exploring in some depth as they shed light on the political context of *Bakchai* and *Frogs* and on their reception, as we shall note in chapter 5.

Two conflicts are at the heart of the episode. One is caused by the resistance of the polis to Kylon’s tyrannical attempt, and a second is the *stasis*, the breakdown of civic cohesion between the Athenians who defend the slaying of Kylon’s co-conspirators and those considering it a sacrilegious crime committed against the inviolable status of suppliants of the goddess Athena and possible cause of *agos* and *miasma*.

Resistance to the would-be tyrant, enemy of the polis, is met unanimously, a theme of relevance in the depiction of Pentheus in *Bakchai* that we shall observe in 5.4. Kylon is a would-be tyrant, in Athens a figure of popular hatred, a religious and civic symbol of a threat to the polis that we shall observe in the figures of Miltiades in 3.3, of Alkibiades in 4.1 and of Pentheus in *Bakchai* in 5.4. Thukydides for instance emphasises the popular opposition to Kylon’s attempt, as it was resisted by all (πανδημεί) Athenians, including those who came from the countryside to lay siege to the Akropolis that had been seized by Kylon and his band (1.126.7). The connotations of a tyrant define Kylon in several versions of the episode. In Herodotus Kylon is a man who aims at tyranny (ἐπὶ τυραννίδι ἐκόμησε) (5.71), in Thukydides he is as an Athenian aristocrat of

noble birth who has a position of power in society (εὐγενὴς καὶ δυνατός), a victor at Olympic games, and who had a direct connection with a family of tyrants, having married the daughter of Megacles tyrant of Megara, a polis that was a traditional enemy of Athens (1.126.3). As we shall observe in 5.4, the figure of the tyrant, who by the late fifth-century came to be considered as a rich, impious and lawless enemy of the communality of the polis, is the tool through which Athenian political thought came to define political equality and democracy.

Yet Athenians were divided by the conflicting moral and civic duties of punishing the would-be tyrant and of preserving the life of the conspirators as suppliants. In most versions of the episode, the solution to *stasis* is connected with the foundations of Athenian democracy. In Herodotos for instance, *stasis* is defined as a violent political armed conflict between the Athenian community and the Spartan Kleomenes, his ally the Athenian aristocrat Isagoras and their oligarchic followers, who demanded the expulsion of the Alkmaionids as responsible, a long time before, for the impious act against the Kylonian conspirators (5.72.2). The victory of the Athenian demos then allowed the Alkmaionid Kleisthenes to come back from exile and re-instate his democratic constitution (5.66). In the *Constitution of the Athenians* the Alkmaionids, considered as guilty of impiety, were put on trial and banished, while the Cretan sage Epimenides purified the polis (2). Afterwards however, *stasis* erupted between the notables and the mass of the people of Athens and lasted a long time (συνέβη στασιάσαι τοὺς τε γνωρίμους καὶ τὸ πλῆθος πολὺν χρόνον) (2), only to be solved by the common choice of Solon as archon and reconciler, (εἴλοντο κοινῇ διαλλακτὴν καὶ ἄρχοντα Σόλωνα), who reformed the constitution and the legal code (5). As we shall observe in 4.3 and 5.11, the concept of mystic/civic reconciliation as solution of *stasis* is a central



notion of Kleokritos' speech after the battle of Mounichia in Xenophon.<sup>158</sup> As a result of the Kylonian affair, Plutarch narrates in *Life of Solon*, the polis of Athens was split between the party of those condemning the archons who had murdered the Kylonian conspirators and those who defended them. *Stasis* reached an acme as the demos was sharply divided (τῆς στάσεως ἀκμὴν λαβούσης μάλιστα καὶ τοῦ δήμου διαστάντος) (12.2). The anger of the divinities expressed itself by causing religious panic in the polis and divine visions (φόβοι τινὲς ἐκ δεισιδαιμονίας ἅμα καὶ φάσματα) (12.3).

A theme that appears in several versions of the episode as the solution of the polis' crisis is the collective adoption of mystic purification rituals. The concept of *katharsis* that we explored in the context of Athenian perception of tragedy and of mystic initiation in 2.3, is here significantly at the crossroad of civic values and mystic initiation rituals. Mentioned briefly as we saw in the *Constitution of the Athenians* (1), the figure of the sage Epimenides of Krete is said to have purified the polis (Ἐπιμενίδης δ' ὁ Κρήτης ... ἐκάθηρε τὴν πόλιν) after the trial that had punished the authors of the sacrilege.<sup>159</sup> This theme is expanded in Plato, as he mentions the figure of Epimenides as a figure who incarnates sanctity and religious healing, mystic purification and collective initiation rituals. Addressing an unnamed Athenian, Klinias from Krete briefly describes the coming of Epimenides to Athens.<sup>160</sup> In Plato Epimenides is a

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<sup>158</sup> Xenophon *Hellenika* 6.3.1-6.

<sup>159</sup> Epimenides is perhaps more than a legendary figure. According to Diogenes Laërtios for instance, Epimenides wrote a *Theogony*. Bernabé 2004-2007 p. 152 quotes Kern 1888, p. 79 who believes a dating of Epimenides' *Theogony* to the sixth century as "*verisimillimum*". He also was credited of having written a *Birth of Korybantes* and *Kuretes*.

<sup>160</sup> Plato *Laws* 1.642d: "τῇδε γὰρ ἴσως ἀκήκοας ὡς Ἐπιμενίδης γέγονεν ἀνὴρ θεῖος, ὃς ἦν ἡμῖν οἰκεῖος, ἐλθὼν δὲ πρὸ τῶν Περσικῶν δέκα ἔτεσιν πρότερον παρ' ὑμᾶς κατὰ τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ μαντείαν, θυσίας τε ἐθύσατό τινας ἃς ὁ θεὸς ἀνεῖλεν."

divine man (ἄνθρωπος θεῖος) and a friend of the Athenians, who, ten years before the Persian war, obeyed a prophecy of Apollo, came to Athens and performed certain sacrifices (θύσας ἐθύσατό τινας) that the god had ordained. What transpires from the mention of Plato is the public nature of the sacrifices Epimenides performed, his nature as a man in close contact with divinity, and his acting in support of the collectivity and in conformity with divine prophecies, that is, in putting into effect the will of Zeus.

In the *Life of Solon*, Plutarch later interestingly expresses through the figures of Epimenides and of Solon the intertwining of mystic, collective rituals of purification and initiation, and the social, constitutional and economic reforms that was attributed to Solon. Despite the decision of the court to send the polluted into exile,<sup>161</sup> diviners declared that the polis was still prey to *agos* and *miasma*, and in need of ritual purifications (καθαρμοί) (12.3). As in the *Constitution of the Athenians* and in Plato, the Athenians then called Epimenides of Phaistos to assist them in the organisation of purification rituals. Plutarch describes Epimenides as a one of the seven Wise Men, a man loved by the gods (θεοφιλής), learned in divine matters (σοφὸς περὶ τὰ θεῖα), and, using mystic cults' terms, learned in divine inspiration and initiation rituals (τὴν ἐνθουσιαστικὴν καὶ τελεστικὴν σοφίαν) (12.4).

In Plutarch's version the ritual purification of the polis is described in terms that point to collective mystic rituals as necessary steps to re-build the harmony of the community *stasis* had destroyed, a pattern we shall observe in 5.10 in the context of *Bakchai* and *Frogs*. Epimenides' greatest achievement, Plutarch notes, was to bring the polis to be observant of justice, and better disposed to civic

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<sup>161</sup> A decision that in itself had a ritual purifying effect on the community. See Parker 1983 p. 114.

harmony and cohesion (μᾶλλον εὐπειθῇ πρὸς ὁμόνοιαν) (12.5). The term ὁμόνοια, the unity of the polis when facing major issues, is the term Thukydides uses to define the goal of the Four Hundred and of the hoplites in revolt in 411, in order to reconcile their differences as both sides feared the loss of the city to the enemy (8.93.3). Perhaps not casually, Thukydides writes that the reconciliation meeting was convened at the sanctuary of Dionysos, the god of reconciliation in *Bakchai* and *Frogs* (see 5.11). Plutarch describes the collective purification of the polis of Athens in revealingly mystic terms that shed light on the mystic nature of the reunification of the polis. In order to achieve the goal of purifying the city from Kylon's *agos* and pacifying the polis (12.1), Epimenides had the Athenians moderate the social conflicts that arose from funeral ceremonies that fostered clan conflicts, but above all he had the community initiated, and ritually purified in various ceremonies that appease divinity by purificatory rituals, and by the construction of new temples (12.5).<sup>162</sup> Evidence for the episode's ideological value in Athens can be found for instance in a seated statue of Epimenides that stood by the statue of Triptolemos, opposite the Eleusinion in Athens, that Pausanias notes (1.14.3-4). While the date of the erection of Epimenides' statue is likely to be the fourth century or later,<sup>163</sup> it was a powerful public reminder of the Athenians' belief of the crucial role played by Epimenides and by mystery cults in a pivotal moment of the early life of the Athenian polis.

Thus, in one of the founding myths of the polis of Athens, some elements of the mystic and political themes we shall observe in *Bakchai* and *Frogs* intermingle. The collective *katharsis* and the mystic initiation of the polis by the godly

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<sup>162</sup> “τὸ δὲ μέγιστον, ἱλασμοῖς τισι καὶ καθαρμοῖς καὶ ἰδρύσεσι κατοργιάσας καὶ καθοσιώσας τὴν πόλιν”.

<sup>163</sup> Keesling 2017 pp. 164-5.

Epimenides, in Plato; the collective purification to eliminate *miasma* and to return to civic cohesion after the Alkmaionids' exile, in Plutarch; a defence of the Alkmaionids as tyrant fighters, together with a definition of a religious and political *stasis* between the polis of Athens and oligarchic circles supported by the Spartans, in Herodotos; Kylon as a figure of tyrant opposed by the Athenians and the curse on the Alkmaionids, in Thukydides. Each author combined the themes of the episodes in a different way, but their attention to the religious and political themes that emerge from their treatments of the episode is evidence for the importance of these themes in the development of Athenian political consciousness.

### 3.2 Political Implications of the Homeric Hymn to Demeter

Some of the same themes animate the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (the "*Hymn*"), a text probably written at some point between the middle of the seventh century and the middle of the sixth century,<sup>164</sup> that narrates the establishment of the mystic rituals of Demeter in Eleusis. It is the earliest textual evidence for the Eleusinian mystery cult and connects diverse elements in the aetiological social and political logic of the polis, elements that clarify the influence of mystery cults on the development of the polis and that we shall find in Aeschylus' *Oresteia* in 3.4 and in *Bakchai* and *Frogs* in chapter 5. The *Hymn* binds together several fundamental religious and political elements in the way Athenians conceived their community. While Burkert defines Greek religion as having

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<sup>164</sup> See for instance Bowden 2010 p. 26. Foley 1994 pp. 29-30 leans towards a date that coincides with the construction of the temple at Eleusis at the time of Solon, in the early sixth century. In her analysis of the cult, Sourvinou-Inwood 2003(a) pp. 26-7 argues for the cult embracing an eschatological dimension and becoming a mystery cult in the early sixth century, at the period when tradition placed the mystic episode of Epimenides.

“no founding figures and no documents of revelation, no organisation of priests and no monastic orders”,<sup>165</sup> this does not seem to apply to the Eleusis rituals and to the *Hymn*, a document perhaps unique in the main body of Greek religion as a text establishing the aetiology of an eschatological cult, of its ritual liturgy, of the clerical order of Eumolpidae and Kerykes, and of some of the main elements of the egalitarian ideology of the polis of Athens.

Until Foley’s 1994 study of the *Hymn*,<sup>166</sup> the attention of scholars of the *Hymn* mainly focused on themes linked to the relationship between the *Hymn* and the stages in the agricultural year on the one hand and on its religious content on the other, while largely overlooking the *Hymn*’s political implications. In his work on the *Hymn* Richardson for instance writes that the expression that opens the cult to all men on earth (ὅς ... ἐπιχθονίων ἀνθρώπων) in 480 “does at least suggest universality”, but adds that “the development was rather in the opposite direction, i. e. *barbaroi* were later excluded because of anti-Persian feelings after the Persian Wars (Isokrates’ *Panagyrikos* 157)”.<sup>167</sup> He also overlooks Demeter’s call to the “whole demos” in 270 and briefly notes instead the cult being open to the whole community of Eleusis in Keleos’ assembling the λαός in 296 but does not explore the issue of the cult’s egalitarian allusions further.<sup>168</sup> Parker too devotes little attention to the socio-political implications of the *Hymn*, while exploring the theme of the *Hymn* expressing the aetiology of the Athenian Panhellenic mission and focusing on the eschatological significance of the Demophöon episode and of the finale of the *Hymn*.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Burkert 1985 (1977) p. 8.

<sup>166</sup> Foley 1994 particularly ‘The Hymn and the Polis’ pp. 142-150.

<sup>167</sup> Richardson 1974 n. ad loc. p. 311.

<sup>168</sup> Richardson 1974 pp. 12-20, in particular p. 17.

<sup>169</sup> Parker 1991 pp. 1-17. See also Alderink 1982 pp. 1-16.

Seaford, writing in the same year as Foley, takes an entirely new direction in the interpretation of the *Hymn*, and convincingly relates its main underlying theme to the tragic pattern of the tension between the enclosed royal household and the demos, between the maenad Demeter (385-6) and the male-dominated socio-political order of the community, tension that is resolved by the goddess gift of renewed fertility of the land and of the Eleusinian mystery cult, themes that Seaford would treat more fully in 2012.<sup>170</sup> While the theme of the aetiology of the liturgy of Eleusinian mystic rituals is certainly at the centre of the *Hymn*, this has to a certain extent jeopardised the exploration of other dimensions of the work,<sup>171</sup> such as the transformation of the social structure the goddess institutes and inspires, which is the theme to which this section is dedicated.

In *Bakchai*, the arrival of divinity from abroad creates a crisis in the community. In the *Hymn*, the crisis is cosmic and imperils the relationship between mankind and divinity. The whole cosmos is separated: Demeter leaves Olympos in search of her daughter; Persephone disappears into Hades; Demeter has stopped the growth of vegetation threatening the survival of mankind and the continuation of those sacrifices that ensure the goodwill of divinity towards mankind. Only the establishment of a new interconnection of the cosmos by the renewal of the fertility of nature and the establishment of initiation rituals can save both mankind and Olympos.<sup>172</sup> The *Hymn* creates, in Strauss Clay's words, "an irreversible alteration in the organization of cosmic space ... its concerns are the relations among the gods, their relations with mortals, and the repercussions of both on spatial and temporal realms".<sup>173</sup> This represents a

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<sup>170</sup> Seaford 1994 pp. 304, 330 n. 6, 383-4; 2012, pp. 24-51.

<sup>171</sup> Strauss Clay 1989 p. 205

<sup>172</sup> Seaford 1994 p. 304; Seaford 2012 pp. 33-6.

<sup>173</sup> Strauss Clay 1989 p. 208.

central element in a radical transformation in Greek culture accompanying an equally radical development in the organisation of society, the creation of the polis of Athens, a process the seeds of which are described in the *Hymn*.<sup>174</sup>

In the *Hymn*, this ultimate cosmic crisis can only be overcome by a collective effort of the polis in establishing the cult of Demeter. The social inclusiveness of the rituals is made clear by the terms δῆμος and λαός used to designate the people of Eleusis. Demeter establishes her cult in Eleusis with these words (271-3): “Let all the people build for me (ἄγε μοι ... πᾶς δῆμος) a great temple with an altar (νηόν τε μέγαν καὶ βωμόν) beneath the sheer wall of the city under the rising hill above Kallichoron”. The expression is an order, an imperative to the πᾶς δῆμος that has fundamental socio-political implications for the nature of the Eleusinian cult and for the polis of Athens. In Homer, the word δῆμος means those living outside the city, and defines the common people engaged in farming, as opposed to the oligarchic families of the polis who live within the city walls.<sup>175</sup> The expression πᾶς δῆμος thus involves the whole demos of Eleusis and stresses the polarity between the enclosed family of Keleos and of the other rulers on one hand and the common people who are specifically called upon to build her temple on the other. It accentuates the direct relationship between the goddess and the city’s population, her future cult and the polis’ body politic. It also impresses an egalitarian sense into the cult’s aetiological tale, that may be compared to the duty to follow the values of the humblest of people (τὸ πλῆθος ὅ τι τὸ φαυλότερον) in *Bakchai* 430.

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<sup>174</sup> Seaford 2012 p. 36: “This fictional configuration of ritual, myth, cosmology, fertility, and transition to the polis emerged from the process ... in which the inhabitants of Attika created their polis”.

<sup>175</sup> “Since the common people lived in the country, the chiefs in the city, the commons, common people ... opposed to βασιλεύς or ἔξοχος ἀνὴρ (Homer *Iliad* 1.188 and 198, etc.)” (LSJ s. δῆμος). Chantraine 2000, ad loc. “δῆμος, d’abord “pays, territoire” ... les gens du peuple, parce que les gens du peuple vivent à la campagne et les grands à la ville. Par opposition aux *eudaimones*, aux *dunatoi*. Cf. Herodotos 1. 196 ”.

The goddess' command (ὥς ἐπέτελλε θεά) is given to Metaneira and her female servants and relayed to Keleos the following day (294). Keleos then calls to assembly in the agora (εἰς ἀγορὴν) the polis' innumerable people (πολυπείρονα λαόν) and bids them to build the temple. The people were won over (ἐπίθοντο) (296-300). These lines express the relationship between ruler and ruled in mythical archaic Greece, as one founded on the need of the ruler to convince his people or his army to implement his decision, an expression frequent in Homer.<sup>176</sup> The use of the term λαός is significant as it marks the mass of people assembled by a leader: in the *Iliad* it marks men, the mass of soldiers as opposite to their leaders,<sup>177</sup> while in Athens it later designated people assembled in the ekklesia<sup>178</sup> or in theatres.<sup>179</sup> The *Hymn* thus emphasises the distinction between the ruler and the "whole people" whom the goddess calls to be in charge of the construction of the temple. The term πολυπείρων indicates the innumerable boundaries between farms, underlining the central role of farming that defines the community of Eleusis in the *Hymn*,<sup>180</sup> and the ritual role of the whole community in building the temple.

The *Hymn* emphasises the concept of justice as the central value of its socio-political order, as an aetiological myth of one of the central tenets of Athens' civic and religious ideology. Keleos is defined as κοίρανος of Eleusis (96). The term κοίρανος, "lord, master, leader, commander" (LSJ) used to denote Eleusis'

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<sup>176</sup> For instance, in Homer *Iliad* 2. 78-9, Aeschylus *Agamemnon* 206.

<sup>177</sup> Homer *Iliad* 13. 108.

<sup>178</sup> For instance, in Aristophanes' *Knights* 163.

<sup>179</sup> For instance, in Aristophanes *Frogs* 676.

<sup>180</sup> Seaford 2012 p. 30.



leader is an archaic word that implies absolute authority in war and in peace.<sup>181</sup> But the ruler is not alone: the rulers who administer law in Eleusis are called law-giving (θεμιστοπόλοι) (103, 215, 473). The term, unique to the *Hymn*, defines the authority of rulers who act to guard traditional customs in accordance with divine authority, θέμις.<sup>182</sup> The expression introduces a series of justice-related concepts that define Eleusis' ruling class composed by a small number of families. Designating the men in Eleusis who could be of assistance to Demeter who is under the semblance of an old beggar, Kallidike ("Fair in Justice"), daughter of Keleos, calls them men of great power (μέγα κράτος) and honour (τιμῇ), whose role is to protect the city and its walls with the civilian arts of their βουλή (150-2). The term βουλή embraces concepts such as "counsel", "advice", "determination", and of their making righteous judgements (ἰθεῖα δίκη), "fairness in giving justice".<sup>183</sup> The application of δίκη presupposes open discussion of opposite opinions in an assembly and judges who would then pronounce the decision: an act that, while not yet as egalitarian as the choice of the jury and its judgement in Aeschylus' *Eumenides*, is not entirely in the sole hands of a king as happens with Pentheus in *Bakchai*. The main moral traits of the heads of the city's ruling families, notes Metaneira later (214-5), are αἰδώς, "respect for the feeling or opinion of others", "shame", "sense of honour" (LSJ) and χάρις, "goodwill", "kindness". As in *Bakchai*, the establishment of initiation rituals transforms the socio-political structures of the

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<sup>181</sup> Chantraine 1990 ad loc.

<sup>182</sup> Benveniste 1969 II p. 103 : "la Thémis est l'apanage de basileus, qui est d'origine céleste, et le pluriel thémistès indique l'ensemble de ces prescriptions, code inspiré par les dieux, lois non écrites, recueil de dits, d'arrêts rendus par les oracles, qui fixent dans la conscience du juge (en l'espèce, le chef de la famille) la conduite à tenir toutes les fois que l'ordre du génoas est en jeu". See also Ostwald 1986 p. 84-85.

<sup>183</sup> On the term δίκη see for instance Benveniste 1969 II pp. 107-110. A similar judgement is described in *Iliad* 497-508 where a dispute between two warriors is judged by the army's elders before the assembly, where a prize would be given to the elder who "spoke the straightest opinion (δίκην ἰθύντατα εἶποι)".

community. The goddess' relationship with mankind is direct, and the κοίρανος Keleos only serves as intermediary of her command to the λαός in the first part of the *Hymn* and, while still defined as leader of the people (ἡγήτωρ λαῶν), is only one of the kings whose responsibilities change, as their law-administering powers and responsibilities now extend to ensuring the organisation and performance of the goddess' mystic rituals. The *Hymn* is particularly emphatic on this point, as it repeats the list of the city's leaders: it is to Triptolemos and Diokles, and mighty Eumolpos and Keleos, leader of the people, that Demeter reveals the conduct of her rites (δοησμοσύνην θ' ἱερῶν) and taught her secret initiation rituals (ῥογία) to all of them.

The aetiology of the role of choral public dancing and singing in the civic and religious life of the polis, heart of the definition of the *thiasoi*/choruses in *Bakchai* and *Frogs*, is suggested in the *Hymn* by reference to the Maiden's Well (99). The well near the house of Keleos is significantly the site where the goddess first sat after arriving at Eleusis, a communal place where young girls and women meet to fetch water. The *Hymn* emphasises the role of women in society, in what may be termed the gender and social inclusiveness of the new ritual: Demeter is a woman and mother of a girl, she is accompanied by feminine deities such as Hekate, Iris and Rhea, girls collect flowers in 4ff. and 417ff., draw water in 105ff and inhabit Metaneira's palace (284). Women have an important role in the rituals of the goddess, in dancing and singing in her honour, an element suggested in the *Hymn* by Demeter herself. While revealing her divine nature to Metaneira and announcing her role in bringing the richest gift and joy to divinities and to all mankind, the goddess calls the place above which her

temple shall stand the place of beautiful dances, καλλίχορος (272).<sup>184</sup> Female choruses in Eleusis may have lasted a long time, as Pausanias (1.38.6) attests that Eleusinian women would gather at the place of beautiful dances to sing and dance for the goddess in his time. As we saw in 2.2, women had a central role in Demetrian rituals.

The cult's egalitarian horizon is wide, as the goddess, in her rage after failing to make Demophöon immortal, addresses all humankind, as all men are equal before the divine, ignorant and foolish, unable to foresee destiny, incurably misled by their lack of sense, whose only hope is performing the goddess' rituals she institutes (256-8). The gifts of the goddess are the same for all: fertility of the soil (469) and the blessing of the rituals (480). The *Hymn's* author thus extends the concept of equality in her cult and in the community of her worshippers from the demos of Eleusis to the whole mankind, similar in its universality to Dionysos' allusions to the cities where barbarians and Greeks mingle, whom he had set dancing and where he had established his initiation rituals, so as to be a visible god for mankind (*Bakchai* 18-22).

Still, the sense of restored cohesion of the community through the newly-instituted Eleusinian rituals, what Seaford calls "the resolution of the crisis" that the *Hymn* creates through a new "interconnection of the sectors of the cosmos",<sup>185</sup> may also be considered as marked by a new polarity. The new order in a sense separates the community into two parts, those Demeter defines as she establishes her mystic rituals addressing Metaneira as the believers who perform due rituals (εὐαγέως ἔρδοντες) (274), and those Hades in his plea to

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<sup>184</sup> On the identity of the Kallichoros and the Maidens' Well see Richardson 1974, pp. 326-8 and Calame 2001 p. 139, n. 142.

<sup>185</sup> Seaford 2012, p. 25.

Persephone defines as who fail to appease the goddess' power with sacrifices, rites and offerings, (367-9). Hades uses the same terms for worshippers that Demeter uses (εὐαγέως ἔρδοντες), while non-believers he calls those who have done wrong (ἀδικησάντες), who will receive retribution (τίσις). The term *dike* here prefigures the notion of justice as a mystic and political concept that we encountered in the Kylon's affair, that we shall observe in Aeschylus' *Eumenides* and in the episodes of Athens' political life that we shall examine in chapter 4 of this work.

In the double *makarismos* at the end of the *Hymn* (480-489) the polarity between initiates and non-initiates involves both their after-life and their earthly life. Firstly, blessed is any mortal on earth who has watched these rituals (ὄλβιος, ὃς τὰδ' ὅπωπεν ἐπιχθονίων ἀνθρώπων): the non-initiated, he who has not participated in the rituals, never has the same lot as his (initiated) equals (οὐποθ' ὁμοίων αἴσαν ἔχει),<sup>186</sup> even when he is dead in the dreary darkness.<sup>187</sup> In the second and stronger *makarismos*, the emphasis is on the rewards the goddesses offer to any mortal on earth they favour with their love (προφρονέως φιλωνται) (487), as they will send to his house Ploutos, the god who gives abundance to mortals.<sup>188</sup> The two terms, ὄλβος and πλοῦτος, are associated in defining spiritual and material wealth, as they embrace the transcendental divine blessing and the material abundance of goods given by the gods. In Hesiod for instance, the link between the deity Ploutos, abundance of food and the goddess Demeter is direct, as Demeter, who fills the barn to

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<sup>186</sup> I would opt for this translation that connects ὁμοίοι with ὃς τὰδ' ὅπωπεν, rather than Foley's 1994 rather vague "same lot".

<sup>187</sup> A condemnation that can be encountered in later works of Greek literature, perhaps a formula pronounced during religious rituals. Cf. For example Sophokles Fr. 837: "ὡς τρισόλβιοι κείνοι βροτῶν, οἱ ταῦτα δερχθέντες τέλη μάλωσ' ἐς Αἴδου· τοῖσδε γὰρ μόνοις ἐκεῖ ζῆν ἔστι, τοῖς δ' ἄλλοισι πάντ' ἔχειν κακά".

<sup>188</sup> Cf. Richardson n. ad loc. pp. 316-7.

those she loves,<sup>189</sup> is Ploutos' mother, while it is Ploutos who brings wealth (ἀφνειός), and happiness (ὄλβος), to those who find him.<sup>190</sup> Another factor that separates initiates from non-initiates is in the *Hymn* the secrecy of initiation rituals (ὄργια σεμνά) that are not to be transgressed, pried into, or divulged (478-9). Secrecy, obedience to the cult's rules and the restrictions to its access to Greek speakers and those who are not guilty of murder helped the self-definition of initiates as members of the cult.

The *Hymn* thus establishes some fundamental values of the Eleusinian cult, values that came to be enmeshed in the Athenian civic ideology, despite the fact that Athens is not mentioned in the *Hymn*.<sup>191</sup> The first is the role of the cult in causing the polis of Eleusis to assemble to resolve a universal crisis. The second is the principle of the social and gender equality of the cult that creates a sense of the communality of initiates.

### 3.3 Demeter, Miltiades and Telines.

Herodotos' construction of the figure of Miltiades son of Kimon and his report on his failed attempt to desecrate Demeter's sanctuary on the island of Paros are evidence for a strand in Greek political thought and Athenian democratic thought in particular: the polarity between the figure of an aristocrat, a wealthy and corrupt would-be tyrant we observed in the figure of Kylon, and its opposite, the mystic and civic connection between mystery cults and the polis, a

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<sup>189</sup> Hesiod *Works and Days* 300-1 "... φιλέη δέ σ' ἐυστέφανος Δημήτηρ αἰδοίη, βίотου δὲ τεινὴν πιμπλήσι καλύην".

<sup>190</sup> Hesiod *Theogony* 971-4.

<sup>191</sup> Perhaps deliberately, as Foley 1994 p. 174 notes: "an archaizing poem would not only no reason to mention Athens but would enhance the cult's claim to immemorial antiquity by ignoring the city."

polarity that we shall examine in 4.1 as it applies to the figure of Alkibiades, and in 5.4 as it applies to the figure of Pentheus in *Bakchai*.<sup>192</sup>

In his moralising account of the figure of Miltiades son of Kimon, hero of Marathon, Herodotos blends several of the characteristics of an enemy of the polis: like Kylon, he is presented as member of a rich and powerful family, the Philaidai, a household wealthy enough to race four-horse chariots at the Olympic games.<sup>193</sup> Since his entry in the narration Miltiades is presented as an impious man who imprisons those who came to him to share his mourning of his dead brother, a man who is the tyrant of the Chersonese under the protection of a personal guard of five hundred mercenaries, an Athenian who married the daughter of the king of Thrace and subsequently a Persian lady, a gift from the Persian king Darius but above all, an ungodly man who attempts to defile the sanctuary of Demeter. To Athenians these were demonstrations of Miltiades' anti-civic immorality: for Athenians acquiring a body guard was a blatant tyrannical act, evidence for a tyrant's mistrust and fear of his co-citizens;<sup>194</sup> marrying the daughter of a powerful foreign king of a notoriously bellicose and hostile tribe and accepting gifts from the Persian king made him a potential enemy of Athens and revealed his ambitions to become an oriental despot.<sup>195</sup> Later in the narration he reaches the acme of immorality, as he attempts to defile the sacred, secret and untouchable rituals of Demeter, the ultimate crime that an Athenian could commit.

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<sup>192</sup> Herodotos 6.35-41, 6.132-4, 6.134.2-136.3.

<sup>193</sup> An interesting research of the financial cost of running a stable of race-horses in Scott 2005 pp. 513-521 and suggests (p. 520) that there were in fifth-century Athens only four families who raced horse teams at Olympia: the Philaids, the Alkmaionids, and those of Kallias and Alkibiades.

<sup>194</sup> See for instance Plato *Republic* 567a-e.

<sup>195</sup> Eastern autocrats were symbols of tyranny. See for instance Mitchell 2013 pp. 155-156.

Herodotos' version of Miltiades expedition to Paros that followed his victory against the Persians is one of several accounts of the episode.<sup>196</sup> Herodotos' choice of version allowed him to set the conflict between religion and the sacrilegious would-be tyrant on Paros, an island known for its cult of Demeter. What Herodotos' public would have known is that Demeter had been one of the main divinities of Paros since archaic times, as for instance in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* she is called queen of sea-encircled Paros at par with Eleusis and Antron (491) and in a fragment Archilochos, the seventh century Dionysiac poet, mentions a festival that was held on the island in honour of Demeter and Kore (fr. 322 West). More evidence on the Parian cult of Demeter is the connection between Archilochos and the cult to which the poet's grandfather Tellis adhered, as noted by Pausanias.<sup>197</sup> A different legend also told the story of Demeter who after having been entertained in Paros in the palace of king Melissos, gave the sixty daughters of the king the loom of Persephone and delivered first to them her sufferings and mysteries: whence the women who take part in the Thesmophoria were thereafter called Melissai.<sup>198</sup> De Polignac notes "the prestige of Demeter in Paros, where the Thesmophorion contained the sacred objects upon which the safety of the city depended",<sup>199</sup> an opinion shared by Picard.<sup>200</sup> On the island men were allowed to participate in Demetrian rituals and were called *Kabarnoi*, as Kabarnos was a mythical

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<sup>196</sup> Herodotos 6.133 ff. Other accounts are in Ephoros, in part of Stephanos Byzantios on Paros, *FGrH* 70 F63, in Cornelius Nepos' *Life of Miltiades* 7 and in four *scholia* to Aelius Aristides. Cf. Scott 2005 pp. 630-647.

<sup>197</sup> In Pausanias 10.28.3 Tellis accompanied the priestess of Demeter, Cleoboea, who carried the goddess' *hiera* to Thasos, as painted by the Thasian Polygnotus at Delphi in a building dedicated by the people of Knidos. West 1974 pp. 24-5 notes that Tellis is a hypocoristic form of Telesicles, literally "Famous Initiate".

<sup>198</sup> *Oxyrhynchus Glossary* (P. Oxy. 1802), probably composed by Klitarchos of Aegina in Alexandria at some date between the second century BC and the first century AD. Cf. Schironi 2009 p. 44, 58-9. *Melissai* are quoted as priestesses of Demeter in Pindar *Pythian* 4.60 and in Callimachus' *Hymn to Apollo* 110-112.

<sup>199</sup> De Polignac 1995 p. 122.

<sup>200</sup> Picard 1950 p. 124-125.

personage of the island who had revealed to Demeter the kidnapping of her daughter, and the reason for the island of Paros to have been called Kabarnis.<sup>201</sup>

Herodotos' version is well known: Miltiades, not succeeding to either obtaining a vast sum of money from the Parians or in breaking through the polis walls, meets Timo, a priestess of the temple of Demeter on Paros. Following her suggestion, he goes to the temple by night, alone, with the intention of moving in the *megaron* something that nobody should move or with some other intention (εἴτε κινήσοντά τι τῶν ἀκινήτων εἴτε ὅ τι δὴ κοτε πρήξοντα). At the door of the goddess' *megaron*, Miltiades, caught by a sudden fearful shudder, φοβίῃ, ran away. Leaping down from the sanctuary's wall he injured his thigh, a wound that would ultimately cost him his life.<sup>202</sup> Upon his return to Athens he was put on trial on charges of fraud and was fined fifty talents, a fine his son Kimon had to pay after his death. In the meantime, the Parians wished to punish Timo and sent a delegation to Delphi to ask if they should put the priestess to death for assisting the enemy in the capture of the city, and for revealing to Miltiades secrets forbidden to males (τὰ ἐς ἔρσενα γόνον ἄρρητα ἰοῦντά). The Pythia replied that Timo was in no way responsible, that Miltiades was supposed to end up badly (τελευτᾶν μὴ εὔ), and something appeared that had led him to these evils (φανῆναι οἱ τῶν κακῶν κατηγεμόνα). Timo was left unpunished.

Herodotos' story is constructed as a morally edifying anti-tyrannical pro-religious tale, and emphasises the religious connection between Demeter, protectress of Paros, and her polis, a relationship that would have recalled to

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<sup>201</sup> Stephanus Byzantinus on Paros (FGrH 70 F63), in Meinecke p. 507, relates also Ephoros' version of the episode.

<sup>202</sup> On the symbolic implications of Miltiades' wound in Herodotos' narrative strategy cf. Felton 2014 pp. 47-61.



his readers that of the goddess and their own Athenian polis. Unlike the authors of other versions, Herodotos' "Parian" version is centred upon the impiousness of Miltiades' attempt to desecrate the sanctuary of Demeter as a moralistic tool to show the fate that awaited desecrators of the cult: "characters who commit impiety in the *Histories* tend to come to grief".<sup>203</sup> Scott aptly calls Herodotos' version of the episode an "urban legend",<sup>204</sup> as it follows the lines of the theme of divine punishment of an impious and rich fraudster. But urban legends also reveal the beliefs of those from which it originates and to whom it is addressed. What was Miltiades trying to achieve in the eyes of Herodotos' audience? Scott for instance gives two different interpretations to Miltiades' motive. In his commentary he saw the possibility that Herodotos' audience could understand his purpose either in the sense that he wished to steal a cult object, without which the Parians may have expected to be punished by the divinity as had happened to them when they had exiled Archilochos, or in the sense of robbing the temple of a talisman protecting the polis.<sup>205</sup>

The effect Herodotos wished his passage to have on his readers lays in his description of Miltiades' intention: to move something unmovable or with some other intention (εἴτε κινήσοντά τι τῶν ἀκινήτων εἴτε ὅ τι δὴ κοτε πρήξοντα). Herodotos does not mention explicitly the notion of theft, but his readers would have been aware of the wealth contained in the treasure of the temple. What does "moving the unmovable" mean? Theft would probably have been described in a different fashion, and ἀκίνητα embraces both unmovable, motionless objects and objects that are not supposed to be moved, touched or

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<sup>203</sup> Hau 2016 p. 189.

<sup>204</sup> Scott 2005 p. 436.

<sup>205</sup> Scott 2005 pp. 437-8.

broken into for religious motives.<sup>206</sup> A similar expression, who touches the untouchable (τῶν ἀθίκτων θιγγανεῖν), is the definition of the unjust, unholy man in Sophokles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* 891. Whatever Miltiades' intentions were, a doubt that Herodotos expresses by the expression ὅ τι δὴ κοτε πρήξοντα, entering the sacred precinct would have been a sacrilegious act, while breaking into the temple itself would have added gravity to the sacrilege.<sup>207</sup> Moving the *hiera* would have desecrated the sanctuary and interrupted the connection between the polis and divinity. This would have endangered the polis' self-identity, cohesion and self-confidence, ensuring that the polis that may then become easy prey for the Athenian troops.

The expression used by Herodotos in defining the reaction of Miltiades to the unnamed vision he had at the door of the *megaron* is also of significance in decoding Herodotos' religious and moral message: φόβικος αὐτὸν ὑπελθούσης, "as he was overwhelmed by φόβικη". The term φόβικη suggests the awe and terror that a vision of divinity (cf. 1.1) would inspire in even the bravest of military commanders. What Herodotos may have been suggesting is an epiphany of the goddess Demeter, as the term used by the Pythia is φαίνομαι. The term and Miltiades' reaction to flee in panic, suggest the goddess' appearance in the full light of her divinity, the apparition of a *phasma*.<sup>208</sup> *Phasmata* are visions in waking reality, as opposed to *oneiroi*, visions in dreams, Plato writes.<sup>209</sup> *Phasmata* often have material reality, they appear during battles

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<sup>206</sup> Cf. Herodotos 1.187 on the tomb of the queen of Babylon, untouched for years.

<sup>207</sup> The penalty in Athens for trespassers was death. Titus Livius 31.4 for instance notes that two young men from Acarnania, ignoring they were committing a sacrilege, entered mixed in the crowd into the temple of Demeter during the festival. Betrayed by their foolish questions, they were put to death.

<sup>208</sup> Some scholars believe instead that the Pythia suggests that Timo was a *phasma*. Hornblower 2017 n. ad loc. for instance, is of the opinion Timo herself was a *phasma* and attributes the expression to the language of epiphanies.

<sup>209</sup> Plato *Laws* 910b.

and cry commands to soldiers,<sup>210</sup> have sexual intercourse with humans and leave their flower garlands to them as a gift as happened to Demaratos's wife of Sparta,<sup>211</sup> and above all are the material and yet metaphysical objects of the vision of the initiates in Plato and Plutarch.<sup>212</sup> One may imagine Miltiades facing the goddess as the divine appearance that the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* describes, as tall as the roof of Metaneira's hall and filling it a heavenly radiance, σέλαος θείοιο (188-9), beaming light from her skin and flooding the whole house with a glare as bright as a star (276-280). Miltiades' reaction recalls Metaneira's, described as seized by reverence (αἰδώς), awe (σέβας), and pale fear (χλωρόν δέος). Miltiades' fright and fall recall the movements of the Asian chorus in *Bakchai* (600-607), when the chorus falls to the ground trembling in fear as the god himself appears before Pentheus' palace in flames.

Herodotos' audience would have taken the apparition of the goddess as an intervention in defence of the sacred nature of her cult and of her polis. The hubristic and impious commander of a hostile army had been repulsed and gravely wounded. The Athenian attack had been defeated and the polis may be imagined returned to its normal life. A fate somewhat similar to that of Pentheus, which confirms the pattern linking tyrannical sentiments, treason against the demos, acts of impiety against the mysteries and the goddess, and divine punishment. These interrelated themes are also interestingly intertwined in Thukydides' account of the scandal surrounding the defacing of the Herms and of mocking the Eleusinian rituals, popularly linked to the figure of Alkibiades, suspected of wishing to become tyrant, an anti-democratic and an impious atheist.

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<sup>210</sup> Herodotos 8.84.

<sup>211</sup> Herodotos 6.69.

<sup>212</sup> Plato *Phaedrus* 250c, Plutarch fragment 178. Cf. Seaford 1981 pp. 259-260, Petridou 2015 pp.64-71.

The association between the cohesion of the polis, social and political concord and the figure of the chthonic goddesses, the power of the cult's *hiera* in quelling *stasis* and promoting civic peace, can also be found in Herodotos' 7.153. The Sicilian colony of Gela had succumbed to *stasis*, and a group of its citizens had been defeated by their opponents and had fled to Maktorion, a nearby city in the inland. Telines, *hierophant* of the sanctuary of the chthonian goddess in Gela, then went to Maktorion and managed to lead the group back to Gela, assisted by no force of men, but only by the power of the *hiera* of the chthonic goddesses (ἔχων οὐδεμίαν ἀνδρῶν δύναμιν ἀλλὰ ἰρὰ τούτων τῶν θεῶν), comparable to those *hiera* that Miltiades may have attempted to desecrate at Paros. The faction holding Gela was won over and let the exiles return to the polis. Telines' descendants consequently became hereditary *hierophants* of Demeter and Persephone, a post they kept for generations.

In the passage Herodotos makes an interesting connection between the power of Demeter's cult and her influence in quelling political strife in a polis. Archaeological remains attest to an early colonisation of Gela by the Rhodians, followed some time later by colons from Krete, who took the upper hand in the polis.<sup>213</sup> The characteristics of the cult of Demeter and Persephone in colonies in Sicily helps in defining the vital role the Eleusinian cult played in Attika. As de Polignac notes,<sup>214</sup> the cult had the function to absorb and resolve tensions between native populations and Greek colonists. In territories outside Greece, Thesmophoria sanctuaries were often built outside the walls of the Greek polis, thus geographically and symbolically open to the native populations who lived

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<sup>213</sup> De Polignac 1995, p. 120.

<sup>214</sup> De Polignac 1995, pp. 89-127.

around the Greek settlements. The participation of women in the cult, some phases of which were exclusively reserved to them (cf. 2.2), added to the cult's integrations function. As the god Dionysos notes in *Bakchai* 18, in Asia cities were inhabited by mixed populations: in new settlements native women may well have been indispensable to the success and prosperity of the polis, as mothers, as intermediaries between colonists and natives and as promoters of the cult of the chthonic goddesses.<sup>215</sup>

The passage can be read as a way to promote the policies of the tyrants of Syracuse, as one of Gelon's ancestors had been one of the original colonists of Gela. But its main significance lays in the role of the cult of Demeter in helping to re-establish civic and religious harmony and cohesion in the polis, which caused the continuing pre-eminence of Telines' successors in the religious life of Gela as *hierophants* of the Demeter's cult. As was the case of Miltiades, physical force is of no avail against the goddess, Herodotos implies: Telines, despite being effeminate and physically weak, managed deeds that only a man of brave spirit and manly strength could accomplish, as armed only with the cult's *hiera* he successfully countered the faction that had prevailed in Gela's *stasis* and persuaded it to make peace.

### 3.4 Mystic/Political Values in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*

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<sup>215</sup> Recent genetic research confirms that the initial colonisation of East Sicily in archaic times was performed mostly by Greek males. Cf. Tofanelli 2016 pp. 429-436.

This chapter is dedicated to the intertwining of mystic, moral and civic themes in *Oresteia*, evidence for the association between mystic cults and civic values in fifth-century Athens.

Some 100-150 years after the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, a half-century before *Bakchai* and *Frogs*, Aeschylus' *Oresteia* was performed at the Great Dionysia in Dionysos' theatre in 458. The political atmosphere in Athens was then particularly tense. Since the constitutional and political reforms of Ephialtes and Perikles in 462 had limited the authority of the Areopagus and ended Athens' alliance with Sparta, the city was in turmoil: Ephialtes, the leader of the democratic faction, was assassinated and his opponent, the aristocratic pro-Spartan Kimon ostracised.<sup>216</sup>

The first theme I shall explore is that of the crisis of the polis in *Oresteia*. The crisis of the community of Argos is emphasised as the general theme of the trilogy in *Oresteia* in the first line of *Agamemnon* as the watchman prays to the gods for a "deliverance from evil" (ἀπαλλαγῇ πόνων) (1). While primarily affecting the watchman, evil comes to be associated with the misfortunes of the house of Atreus (18) as its release is connected with the rejoicing in the polis that the watchman expects as the light announcing the Greek victory at Troy appears: many dances will take place in the polis of Argos (20-24). The mention of choral singing and dancing, that collective act of religious worship and civic unity of a polis, a theme that we encountered in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* in 3.2, is here significant as it connects the mystic notion of the state of salvation and bliss after initiation with the civic cohesion created by the dancing and

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<sup>216</sup> Plutarch *Life of Kimon* 17.2, Plutarch *Life of Perikles* 9.4

singing ritual.<sup>217</sup> Deliverance from evil connects the whole trilogy, from its introduction in the prologos of *Agamemnon*, through the narration of the religious purification and judicial acquittal of Orestes, to the liberation of the polis of Athens from *stasis* under the protection of the Eumenides in the exodos of *Eumenides*.

The solution to Argos' misfortunes needs to be civic and legal to be final. When he approaches the goddess Athena, Orestes has already been freed from his religious guilt by purification rituals and learned the virtue of *euphemia* (*Eumenides* 276-279), but his ultimate deliverance from evil can only be delivered by the polis of Athens, by a judicial court of citizens, as Apollo declares (*Eumenides* 81-83). After the judgment that finally frees Orestes from pollution, the nature of the threat to the community opposes the Erinyes and the polis of Athens. The Erinyes threaten its destruction and declare they intend to spread poison over the city, deadly to the land (χθονὶ ἄφορον), a pestilence that destroys vegetation and children, a man-destroying plague, a threat they repeat twice (*Eumenides* 780 ff., 810 ff.). In *Eumenides*, *stasis* is the greatest enemy of the polis and is the subject of Athena's answer to the menaces of the Erinyes. Athena, the impersonation of her polis of Athens (474, 487 etc.), asks the Erinyes, once they accept their new role, to refrain from encouraging blood feuds (μὴ βάλης/μὴθ' αἵματηρὰς θηγάνας) that madden the young with wine-less fury, and not to excite in citizens the spirit of war among

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<sup>217</sup> Thomson 1938 I pp. 14-16, II pp. 2-3. As Thomson points out, deliverance from evil is a concept that, while in common use as a proverb, is also used in mystic cults as denoting the state of spiritual bliss granted to initiates. Thomson' list of examples of the use of this expression to describe the outcome of initiation rituals is exhaustive: suffice perhaps to limit it to Plato's mention of the soul in heaven as free from these evils (ἀπηλλαγμένη τούτων τῶν κακῶν) (Plato *Phaedo* 70a). Aelius Aristides describes as the gain to be obtained from participation to the Eleusinian rituals as not only joy (ἡ εὐθυμία), but releases and liberations (λύσεις καὶ ἀπαλλαγαί) from the troubles of the past and from the state non-initiates dwell, in darkness and mud (ἐν σκότῳ τε καὶ βορβόρῳ) (Aelius Aristides 19.259 Dindorff).

relatives that emboldens them to fight each other (Ἄρη/ἐμφύλιόν τε καὶ πρὸς ἀλλήλους θρασύν) (858-863). Once they accept their new role as benefactors of the polis, the *Semnai Theai* set out their gifts to the polis in a powerful crescendo (916-987). No violent winds will uproot trees or blow scorching heat that robs plants of their buds, no plague will destroy crops, flocks will flourish and bear twin young, men will not die before their time, young women will get husbands. Images of material prosperity merge with political pleas: the *Semnai Theai* solemnly pray that civil war (στάσις), insatiable of evils (ἄπληστος κακῶν) may never rage in the polis, and that the blood of citizens may never be spilt, which would cause the ruin of the polis because of lust for revenge through murders in revenge for blood (δι' ὀργὰν ποινᾶς/ἀντιφόνοι ἄτας) (975-987). The newly found cohesion of the polis is expressed in the wish of the *Semnai Theai* for the people of Athens to unite in common love and in shared hatred of the enemy (χάρματα δ' ἀντιδιδόειν/κοινοφιλεῖ διανοίᾳ/καὶ στρυγεῖν μιᾷ φρενί), sentiments that cure many evils. In this concise definition Aeschylus expresses the polis' most fundamental civic values as embodiment of the cohesion of the community, a concept that accompanies Athens' history of the second half of the fifth-century as we shall note for instance in Xenophon's rendition of the democratic revolt against the Thirty in 4.3.

In *Agamemnon*, the evil that the community suffers from the misbehaviour of the royal house is emphasised by the association between Klytaimnestra, Aigisthos and the powerful political negative connotation of tyranny. Aigisthos shares the characteristic features of the tyrant we examined in the case of Kylon and Miltiades (see 3.1 and 3.3): a would-be tyrant, but a coward (1633-1635), together with Klytaimnestra, tyrants of the land (*Choephoroi* 973). In the powerful scene that follows the slaying of Agamemnon Aeschylus emphasises the contrast between the couple of tyrants with the orderly democratic debate



of the members of the chorus.<sup>218</sup> In their discussion on how to react to the slaying of Agamemnon, a member of the chorus charges the unnamed slayers of Agamemnon with planning to set a tyranny in the polis of Argos (1346-1371). The audience, aware of the identity of the slayers, would have associated the crime of kin-slaying with that of would-be tyrants and would have shared the chorus' preference for death rather than life under tyrants (1362-1365). The conflict in *Choephoroi* is stasis between the *philoï* of Orestes and Elektra, defenders of the honour of their father Agamemnon (*Choephoroi* 110, 456, 497 552, 833 etc.) and their enemies (460, 790, 952 etc.). The polis exists because the tyrants are dead: the political thread we shall observe in *Bakchai* is expressed in *Choephoroi* by the chorus of slave women who applaud Orestes for having cut off the heads of the serpents and having freed the polis of Argos (1044-1047).

Aeschylus powerfully concludes the association between the polis and its anti-tyrannical essence in the second stasimon of *Eumenides*, where the Erinyes state their divine status and the benefits to mankind brought by religion, and plea for mankind to follow the middle way, not the two extremes of anarchy or tyranny, respect the unwritten laws, and avoid hubris (526-537). This note is significant, as it summarises the choral moral and political stance on moderation in *Bakchai*, and is similar to what Euripides has Theseus declare in *Hiketides* 244-245.<sup>219</sup> The plea is again stressed by Athena in establishing the Areopagos as the political body that will grant the application of justice and dissuade citizens from seeking either anarchy or tyranny (696-698).

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<sup>218</sup> Cf. Beer 1981 p. 50.

<sup>219</sup> "τρίων δὲ μοιρῶν ἡ 'ν μέσῳ σώζει πόλεις, κόσμον φυλάσσοις' ὄντιν' ἂν τάξη πόλις."

Compared to the clarity of the civic and political message to be found in *Eumenides*, its connection with mystery cults is expressed in a sub-text of allusions and images, perhaps evident to a contemporary audience but less to us. For this reason, the mystic threads in *Oresteia* have been neglected by most scholars, with the exception of the pioneering work by Headlam,<sup>220</sup> Thomson<sup>221</sup> and, more recently, by Seaford,<sup>222</sup> Bowie,<sup>223</sup> and Widzisz,<sup>224</sup> for instance. It is curious to note that even scholars who have focused on some of the concealed symbolic sub-text of *Oresteia*, such as for instance Gantz<sup>225</sup> and G. Ferrari,<sup>226</sup> both of whom explored at length the religious ritual nature of fires and lights in the trilogy, overlooked the connection between fires and lights and the mystic ritual references in *Oresteia*.

Throughout the trilogy Aeschylus uses imagery of darkness and light to express mystic and political deliverance from evil.<sup>227</sup> The whole of the *Oresteia* can be considered as describing mankind's passage from darkness to light, from the night surrounding the watchman in the opening of *Agamemnon*, through the black and ominous atmosphere of *Choephoroi*, to the final sunlight evoked by Athena as a blessing of the *Semnai Theai* (906, 924). The light of torches accompanies the tamed Erinyes to their new dwelling in *Eumenides*' exodos, as it accompanies the cortege escorting Aeschylus to Athens in *Frogs*' finale, as we

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<sup>220</sup> Headlam 1906 pp. 268-277.

<sup>221</sup> Thomson 1935 and 1938 used and developed Headlam's unpublished notes on the *Oresteia*. See Thomson's comments on his use of Headlam material in Thomson 1938 pp. ix-xi.

<sup>222</sup> Seaford 1981 pp. 252-275, Seaford 2012 pp. 125-205.

<sup>223</sup> Bowie 1993 pp. 10-31.

<sup>224</sup> Widzisz 2010 pp. 461-489 unfortunately limits his interesting exploration of Eleusinian themes to *Agamemnon*'s prologos and to *Choephoroi*'s third stasimon.

<sup>225</sup> Gantz 1977 pp. 28-38.

<sup>226</sup> G. Ferrari, 1997 pp. 1-45.

<sup>227</sup> Cf. Bowie 1993 p. 24.

shall also observe in 5.8. The way Aeschylus builds up a crescendo in his treatment of the issue of light/liberation from darkness/evil is complex and allusive. In the prologos that opens the trilogy, the watchman's night is gloomy, and the audience would have felt the same. Aeschylus creates a series of close associations between the torch message, light in darkness and ἀπαλλαγὴ πόνων (20-21). The watchman enjoys no rest on his restless bed, wet with dew, to the side of which stands fear instead of sleep (φόβος ἀνθ' ὕπνου) (14). Still, the night is full of stars, planets, fires and lights that fill the darkness, a prefiguration of the night-time procession of torches accompanying the *Semnai Theai* to their temple, an echo of the light of the torches accompanying the dances during the mystic rituals that we shall encounter in *Frogs* and *Bakchai*. The watchman is on guard for a signal (λαμπάδος τό σύμβολον/αὐγὴν πυρός). Terms belonging to the λαμπ- family are repeated in a crescendo, terms that express the notion of human-lit fires in darkness.<sup>228</sup> While on watch for "a message of torch-light, a dawn of fire" (λαμπάδος τό σύμβολον/αὐγὴν πυρός), under the "radiant powers" (λαμπροὺς δυνάστας) of star constellations, the watchman prays that release from evil come in the form of good news appearing in a fire in darkness (εὐαγγέλου φανέντος ὀρφναίου πυρός). Then, in lines 21 and 22, the beacon-light finally appears to the joy of the watchman. The watch-fire of night is a light as bright as day (λαμπτήρ νυκτός, ἡμερήσιον/φάος). The light, the watchmen exclaims, will beam over many a dance in Argos, and prefigures the torches in the trilogy's finale. The expression of the fire at night recalls some of the descriptions of the blissful vision awaiting the initiate we observed in section 1.1, as he passes from a state of pain and anguish in darkness to one of bliss in the full, bright light of divinity. In Phaedrus 250 b-c Plato for instance uses two of the terms of the

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<sup>228</sup> Cf. Chantraine 1968 II p. 617.

watchman to describe the light awaiting initiates, beauty shining in brightness (κάλλος λαμπρόν), that initiates saw in pure light (ἐν αὐγῇ καθαρᾷ), terms that recall the marvellous light (φῶς θαυμάσιον) in Plutarch' fragment 178.

But the watchman's images of light turn into disappointment, as the chorus watches the city of Argos aflame with sacrifice fires as high as heaven (οὐρανομήκης λαμπράς) that echo the flames engulfing the city of Troy and its sullied temples. The slaying of Agamemnon and Cassandra confirms the ominous and ambiguous sign given by the fires, as it is welcomed by Aigisthos with an image of light, as a "kind light, day of just reward" (φέγγος εὖφρον ἡμέρας δικηφόρου) (*Agamemnon* 1577) as he ominously salutes the slaying of Agamemnon. In *Choephoroi* the audience is pushed further into darkness and fear. The House of Atreus, and the polis with it, is in ruin, enshrouded by darkness that men loathe (ἀνήλιοι βροτοστυγεῖς/δνόφοι καλύπτουσι δόμους) (*Choephoroi* 50 ff.). The cycle of hopes for the light and their reversals continue, as Orestes enters the palace as night is falling (*Choephoroi* 660-1), and the chorus expresses its hope for the radiant light of freedom to come (ἐλευθερίας φῶς λαμπρόν) (*Choephoroi* 810), only to be met with the news of Aigisthos' death followed by Klytaimnestra's. Still the chorus continues to be optimistic as it salutes the new slayings with a shout of triumph (942) and with the exclamation "The light has come!" (961), a hope that is dispelled by Orestes who notes that his victory has produced a pollution that can only be cleansed by his own death (1017). The reversal is complete in the very last scene of *Choephoroi*, when the audience is plunged into the horror of the appearance of the Erinyes, unseen by the chorus and by the audience but seen by the terrified Orestes.

In *Eumenides*' exodos, the conversion of the Erinyes that follows their defeat at Orestes' trial is also marked by powerful images of lights. The images that progressively emerge contrast sharply with the images of darkness, blood, poison, plague that have filled the action in *Oresteia* that far. Idyllic pictures of light fill the horizon as mankind abandons the practice of unlimited revenge and take up the worship of the *Semnai Theai*. Immediately after the Erinyes' acceptance of their new site of worship Athena exclaims her wish that the Erinyes will bring blessings to the polis (903-909). The new deities will cause breezes of wind to come over the land, breathing the air of bright sunshine, ensure fertility and prosperity for the land and its people. In their answer to Athena the chorus of *Semnai Theai* exclaims its wish that the bright light of the sun (φαιδρὸν ἀλίου σέλας) may be beneficial to Athens' life (922-926).

Terms used in the prologos of *Agamemnon* here reverse their ominous tone and friendly λαμπάς, σέλας, φέγγος, πῦρ, φῶς illuminate the scene. Light in darkness is now sacred, as Athena exclaims to the Erinyes on the way to their new dwellings, by the sacred light (πρὸς φῶς ἱερὸν) of the polis' processional escorts (1005). The goddess declares a few lines later that she will escort them in the procession by the light of blazing torches (φέγγει λαμπάδων σελασφόρων) (1022) and orders the light of torches (τὸ φέγγος πυρός) to illuminate them (1028-1029). The chorus of escorts closes the scene and the trilogy, with another vivid image of light as it exhorts the *Semnai Theai* to delight at the fire that devours the torches (πυριδάπτος λαμπάδα) (1036-1042) as the ritual choral scream of joy of women (ὀλολυγμός), is intoned for the third time in the trilogy,<sup>229</sup> this time in its proper ritual implication as it

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<sup>229</sup> The word is pronounced several times in *Agamemnon* to mark crucial moments. It firstly marks the vain hopes of the watchman as he wishes Clytaemestra to raise it in the royal palace to welcome the beacon-signal (*Agamemnon* 28).

accompanies the choral dance and singing act, a scene that would have connected the audience to the Panathenaia procession on the one hand, and to the atmosphere of the Eleusinian night rituals on the other.

In the *Oresteia* the theme of the polis as a cohesive community is expressed in a crescendo. In the prologos of *Agamemnon* the term “polis” is not used, but we saw the theme evoked by the expectation of dancing and singing in the city of Argos at the good news of victory at Troy (23-4). Choral dancing is an expression of civic cohesion, and the term polis is associated with that collective activity by the herald who announces the return of Agamemnon to a polis that is rejoicing at the glad news of deliverance (σωτηρίων πραγμάτων εὐάγγελος) (646-7). In *Choephoroi* the term polis is mentioned only twice, once in expressing the polis’ new freedom (1044-1047), but in *Eumenides* the term appears some twenty-two times. There the polis of Athens is presented as the polis of the goddess Athena and associated with the institutions Athena will establish (79, 475, 524, 572, 617, 687, 698, 701, 733 etc.). In the goddess’ words to the herald opening the trial of Orestes and the announcement of her ordinances (θεσμοί), the whole polis must learn and apply them for everlasting time (εἰς τὸν αἰανῆ χρόνον) (571-2). It is an openly political plea, associating the recognition of the people of the polis (Ἀττικὸς λεώς) (681) as a coherent community, responsible in judging Orestes. The judges the goddess will choose will be the best of her citizens, Athena declares (487), they will “represent the whole polis, being the

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Then Clytaemestra in her double talk declares to the chorus to have raised a cry of triumphant joy (ἄνωλόλυξα) when the first nocturnal messenger came (*Agamemnon* 587-588), marking in reality her joy at her impending act of murder. The same image recurs again as Cassandra reveals that Clytaemestra uttered it as a sacrilegious sign of exultation as Agamemnon entered the palace (*Agamemnon* 1236-1237). In *Choephoroi* it marks again misguided joy at a sacrilegious sacrifice, as Orestes and Pylades force Clytaemestra to enter the palace to her death (*Choephoroi* 942-943). Cf. Bowie 1993 pp. 27-31.

flower of its manhood".<sup>230</sup> It is thus by a human and egalitarian judicial process that Orestes is able to escape his fate as victim of the unending cycle of divinely-ordained revenge killing that had seemed unstoppable.

In the last scene of the *Oresteia* (1003-1047) a short passage of 42 verses, Aeschylus brings to completion the imagery motifs of the trilogy and brings all its complex issues to its mystic, civic and political solution. It is a scene of great communal rejoicing: Athenians are free from the threat of the Erinyes, have succeeded in establishing a new civic order for the polis based on a divine-ordained judicial system, the *Semnai Theai* have been accepted by the polis of Athens as deities and have their own dwelling on the Acropolis near the temple of Athena, where the citizens of the city will worship them. Their power will benefit the city and assure its prosperity and victory in war. The scene uses mystic images on a background linked to the Panathenaic procession, merging the main civic and religious cults of the polis of Athens.<sup>231</sup> In addition to the mystic associations of the images of light and torches we examined, some elements link the scene to religious rituals, such as the twice-repeated religious ritual formula of *euphemia* that opens the procession escorting the *Semnai Theai* to their new dwellings (εὐφραμεῖτε δέ, χωρεῖται) (1035-9).

In conclusion, in *Eumenides* Aeschylus merges mystic and civic elements in the solution to the trilogy: the divine law of blood retribution is cancelled by the human code of laws administered by the polis' Areopagos; the chthonian punishers of *agos* and pollution become the *Semnai Theai*, goddesses who will keep civic *stasis* under control; the light of torches that had been associated with

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<sup>230</sup> MacLeod 1982, p. 127.

<sup>231</sup> Cf. Headlam 1906 p. 275.

the hope of a deliverance from evil is now accompanying the grand and solemn Panathenaic procession to the temple of Athena.

## **4 Religion and *Stasis* in Late Fifth-Century Athens**

In the following sections we shall examine some instances of what some ancient Greeks wrote about the relationship between mystery-cults and the polis. I have taken this evidence not as a record of what may have really happened, but as an expression of what mystery cults represented in the collective religious and civic consciousness of Athenians. For this reason, these episodes of Athens' political life have been ordered in the chronology attributed to them by the Athenians, regardless of the period when they were written down.

As we shall observe, the role of mystery cults in the life of the polis was perhaps a more central role than modern readers generally realise. Not only did mystic initiates represented a quarter or more of the population (see 2.1), but the mystic/political values we encountered in the episode of Epimenides purifying the polis of Athens, in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, in Herodotos' tales on Demeter's role on the island of Paros, of her cult in Gela and in Aeschylus' *Oresteia* permeated Athenian political consciousness. I argue that mystery cults came to be an integral part of the way the polis came to define itself, an ideally egalitarian and democratic community ruled by law.

### **4.1 The Herms and Mysteries Scandal.**



This episode stands out in the narration of Athenian political history in the fifth century ten years before the performance of *Bakchai* and *Frogs*. Euripides and Aristophanes were almost certainly witnesses of this example of *stasis* in Athens, which may have helped shaping their vision of morals and politics. In this section I shall focus on some themes as ideological and emotional background to the sentiments of the spectators of *Bakchai* and *Frogs*. The first is the gradual change in the popular response to the scandal from confusion and alarm to one of open anti-oligarchic democratic mass opposition, prompted by the outrage inflicted on the Eleusinian cult; the second theme is the fusion of religious sentiments, hatred of tyrants and of oligarchic rule that developed in the aftermath of the scandal that gradually formed the nucleus of Athenian political consciousness after the fall of the Thirty; the third is the pivotal role of mystery cults in expressing the anti-tyrannical civic cohesion in Athens, that provided inspiration to the democratic rebellion against the Thirty as recounted by Xenophon.

The evidence we have derives from ancient authors who had widely different political views, aims and priorities.<sup>232</sup> On the episode of the scandal of Herms and of the outrage against the mysteries we shall use the account of Thukydides (while trying to recognise his implicit moral and political agenda), that of Xenophon, the direct account by Andokides, keeping in mind Andokides' legal and political priorities as one of the guilty parties, and that of Plutarch' *Life of Alkibiades*. For the episode of Alkibiades' return to Athens in 407 the sources are Xenophon<sup>233</sup> and Plutarch, who based himself on contemporary sources.<sup>234</sup>

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<sup>232</sup> Thukydides 6.27-29, 53, 60-61; Andokides *De Mysteriis*, Plutarch *Life of Alkibiades*, Xenophon *Hellenika* 1.4.18.

<sup>233</sup> Xenophon *Hellenika* 1.4; Plutarch *Alkibiades* 33-4.

<sup>234</sup> In 32.3, starting his narration of the return of Alkibiades to Athens, Plutarch comments on his sources, declaring Duris the Samian as untrustworthy, and Theopompus, Ephorus and Xenophon as his preferred sources.

Despite their diverse ideological approaches, these authors' reports suggest that these episodes may be regarded as a turning point in the interrelation between religious sentiments and political thought in the collective imagination of Athenians.

It took time for scholars to recognise the importance of religious sentiments in the episode. While Grote in the mid-nineteenth century puts an emphasis on the religious aspect of the crimes, and defines imaginatively the reaction of the Athenians as "mingled dismay, terror, and wrath ... if we could imagine the excitement of a Spanish or Italian town on finding that all the images of the Virgin had been defaced during the same night, we should have a parallel ... to what was now felt at Athens", his lead was not followed.<sup>235</sup> In his 1962 work on Andokides' *De Mysteriis*, MacDowell emphasises what he believes was the merely ritualistic and formal nature of Greek religion, ignores the connection between mystery cults and the way the Athenian demos defined itself, the value of the Herms as symbols of democracy, and believes that the popular sentiment that followed both affairs was "fanned by someone for political purposes".<sup>236</sup> In his completion of Gomme's work, Dover dedicates only a short paragraph to the relevance of the Eleusinian mysteries to Athenians, and dismisses the issue: "Alkibiades and his friends are not likely to have cherished simple piety; parody of the mysteries at a private entertainment could no doubt be exceedingly funny; and no more need to be said on the question whether, or why, the mysteries were parodied". In his work on the religious dimension of the Peloponnesian war, Hornblower dedicates only a short passage to the Eleusinian cult being absent in Thukydides, except for an "indirect mention" in

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<sup>235</sup> Grote 1850 Vol. 7 pp. 230-1.

<sup>236</sup> MacDowell 1962 pp. 6-10.

the scandal of the mysteries, and treats Eleusis from the Athenians' point of view as "a major garrison deme and a first line of defence against a Peloponnesian invasion", ignoring entirely the political dimension of the cult.<sup>237</sup> In recent years, scholarship recognised the episode' relevance in terms of the Athenians' religious and civic ideology. For instance, Ostwald,<sup>238</sup> Furley,<sup>239</sup> Crawley Quinn<sup>240</sup> and Osborne<sup>241</sup> have substantially deepened the research on the episode connecting it to the religious and political significance of the Herms and of mystery cults, and even Hornblower radically modified his position in 2008, although he still refrained from fully accepting the political significance of the mystery cults and the Herms.<sup>242</sup> Furley, who seems to offer the most complex interpretation of the scandal, bases it on the hypothesis that "the Eleusinian cult from 423 to 415 became a symbol of peace".<sup>243</sup> Furley thus conjectures a link between the cult of Demeter and a current of public opinion that opposed the expedition to Sicily and tried to sabotage it, and attributes Alkibiades' role in the profanation of the mysteries to his opposition to the Eleusinian priesthood, who were heading a sort of "peace party".<sup>244</sup> This view is perhaps extreme and influenced by modern preconceptions of the political scene in fifth-century Athens, but helps in identifying the affair as a moment of radicalisation in the political views of Athenians.

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<sup>237</sup> Hornblower 1992 pp. 169-197, especially pp. 185-6.

<sup>238</sup> Ostwald 1986 pp. 161-9; 322-7; 537-550.

<sup>239</sup> Furley 1996 pp. 1-162, perhaps the most complete study of the affair.

<sup>240</sup> Crawley Quinn 2007 pp. 82-105.

<sup>241</sup> Osborne 1985 pp. 47-73, and 2010 pp. 341-367.

<sup>242</sup> Hornblower 2008, Vol III pp. 367-372.

<sup>243</sup> Furley 1996 pp. 39-40.

<sup>244</sup> Furley, despite his declared intention to give religion its proper importance in the context of the scandal, gives scant attention to the complex cult of Demeter, and dedicates only a few passages to it in pp. 34-6. His focus, like most scholars, is on the event's political causes and signification.

As narrated by Thukydides, the defacement of the Herms was the opening of the scandal. In Athens Herms were ubiquitous in their apotropaic function, they guarded houses, stood on many street corners and were particularly numerous in places of civic and religious relevance, such as the agora.<sup>245</sup> Whatever its perpetrators and their final intentions, the defacement of the Herms was above all seen by Athenians as an attack on the political values of the demos as an egalitarian and democratic political body. In their religious and political context, the Herms were a significant factor in the cohesion of the democratic polis. As Osborne, Furley, and Crawley Quinn convincingly argue, the Herms were ubiquitous, powerful reminders of civic and democratic values to passers-by.<sup>246</sup> A group of three Herms had been erected in the area of the agora in memory of the victors at the siege of Eion that took place in the 470's, a successful campaign headed by Kimon to expel the Persians from Thrace.<sup>247</sup> Aiskhines tells the patriotic and democratic story of the episode (3.183-5). When the victorious generals came back to Athens the demos gave them the right to set up three stone Herms in the Stoa of the Herms, but on condition that they did not inscribe their names on them as was usual, in order to remind passers-by that the victory belonged to the demos, not to a few generals. "A blow struck against the Herms was a blow struck against democracy".<sup>248</sup>

Alongside the traditional interpretation of Herms' apotropaic function in the doorways of private houses and public religious and civic buildings Furley

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<sup>245</sup> See Furley 1996 pp. 13-17 for a full survey of Athens' public Herms. Herms were found in gymnasia, a famous Herm sculpted by Alkamenes stood at the entrance of the Akropolis (Pausanias 1.22.8).

<sup>246</sup> Furley 1996 pp. 13-30; Crawley Quinn 2007, pp. 90-93, Osborne 2010, in particular pp. 356-366.

<sup>247</sup> Thukydides 1.98.

<sup>248</sup> Osborne 1985 p.67.

offers a new facet to the issue.<sup>249</sup> Hermes' role as divine messenger and go-between between human and gods is part of Greek theology since archaic times, and his function is not only to transmit Zeus' will, but also to convey to divinities the prayers of humans during sacrifices. In short, Hermes embodied the interrelation between divinity and mankind, the very interrelation that we saw at the centre of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*. Whatever the intentions and the political affiliation of the perpetrators of the defacement of the Herms, the whole polis may have felt that their individual and social identity under threat.

In parallel, the mock enacting of the rituals of the Eleusinian mysteries hit deeper into the psychology of the demos than the defacement of the Herms and was an act of civic and religious sacrilege. Revealing the details of the rituals to non-initiates was perhaps the gravest crime in the Athenian code and punishable by death,<sup>250</sup> while mocking the mysteries was a metaphorical act of blasphemous destruction. The fact that mock celebrations of mystic rituals had been performed as a deliberate gesture of civic and religious outrage (ἐφ' ὑβρεῖ) and had been performed for some time in some private houses, made the matter all the graver. The spiritual link between the polis and the liminal sanctuary of the two goddesses at Eleusis was a deep one, and one that could influence the polis' collective determination on the eve of the Sicilian expedition, a factor we explored in the case of Miltiades at Paros and Telines at Gela (3.3).

How did Athenians react? Thukydides interestingly creates a crescendo in the reactions of the demos to the two affairs. In his narration the enthusiasm for

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<sup>249</sup> Furley 1996 pp. 21-28.

<sup>250</sup> A famous case was the one of Diagoras of Melos, condemned to death around the same date of the Herms affair for *asebeia* towards the mysteries (Diodoros 13.6).

the Sicilian expedition was general. Thukydides emphasises the lust of all Athenians for the enterprise that Nikias' warning had paradoxically encouraged and lists the motivations of different classes of people to participate in it (6.24). The foolishness of some and the short-sightedness of others is the emphasis of the passage: old people felt that the expedition was safe because of the size of the force Nikias had recommended to muster against Syracuse; the young longed to visit foreign sites to watch spectacles; the crowd and the soldiers wished to earn money and to be assured of future pay by their conquests. Popular hopes for future conquests were not limited to the conquest of Sicily, but included the Greek territories in Italy and Carthage in order to arm a force that would subdue the whole Peloponnese, at least in Alkibiades' hopes (6.15.2, 6.90).<sup>251</sup> There is here a hint of a contrast between the expansionist greed of the Athenians and the polis' traditional values. In Athenian political and religious consciousness, the craving for money only happens in the sphere of the individual and encourages hubris and lawlessness.<sup>252</sup> There was very little opposition to the project: the few who did not approve of the expedition chose not to vote against as they were afraid of the enthusiasm of the majority.

Thukydides stresses the popular nature of the support for the enterprise: there is no mention of the self-governing body of the polis, the *ekklesia*, or even of the *demos*: all Athenians alike fell in love with the expedition (ἔρως ἐνέπεσε τοῖς πᾶσιν ὁμοίως ἐκπλεῦσαι).<sup>253</sup> The same definition of mass enthusiasm marks the departure of the fleet in 415. On the appointed day, the Athenians who were to man the fleet went to Piraeus at daybreak and were accompanied by the whole rest of the population in the polis, Athenians and foreigners, (ὁ

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<sup>251</sup> Cf. also Aristophanes *Knights* 1300-1304.

<sup>252</sup> Cf. for instance Solon fr. 4.6; 9.

<sup>253</sup> Thukydides 6.24.3.

ἄλλος ὄμιλος ἅπας ὁ ἐν τῇ πόλει καὶ ἀστῶν καὶ ξένων)<sup>254</sup> to admire the splendour and power of the fleet.<sup>255</sup> The terms Thukydides uses emphasise his reserve on the enterprise and on the egoistical judgment of the crowd. He calls the sentiment of the people “ἔρως”, “passionate desire”, a sentiment very far from the civic and mystic term for reason and self-control (σωφροσύνη), and then qualifies the people’s enthusiasm, ἐπιθυμία, with the term ἄγαν, “excessive”. The emphasis on the massive support for the expedition moved by greed also defines in absentia the smallness of the group who stood in opposition to it, to which the exiled Thukydides and the authors of the sacrilegious outrages may well have belonged.

The immediate reaction of the people to the scandal of the Herms, in Thukydides’ narrative, identifies as the culprits unnamed conspirators but is far from being clearly focused on a political adversary. The defacement had initially aroused suspicions of a conspiracy aimed at discouraging the expedition,<sup>256</sup> at introducing into the polis an undefined order of “newer things” (νεωτέρων πραγμάτων) and upset democracy (ξυνωμοσία δήμου καταλύσεως).<sup>257</sup> As Thukydides’ readers would have been aware, the wording of the threat to the polis mirrored the wording of the traditional Solonian *patrios*

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<sup>254</sup> Thukydides 6.30-1.

<sup>255</sup> The term ὄμιλος Thukydides employs emphasises the unorganised nature of the crowd. The term designates in Homer the crowd assembled for a feast or for a spectacle, an unorganised mass of mixed people (*Odyssey* 1.225, *Iliad* 18.603, 23.651). In Thukydides (4.125) the term designates for instance the light infantry of irregulars as opposed to the hoplites, the crowd assembling to listen to Perikles’ funeral speech (2.34.8), a crowd composed of Athenians and foreigners (2.36.4). In Herodotos it describes for instance an unorganised crowd of fighters attacking the enemy pell-mell and shouting (9.6).

<sup>256</sup> MacDowell 1962 p. 9 for instance notes that Hermes was also the god of travellers, and the consequences of his wrath would have been an ominous sign (οἰωνός), for the expedition, the defacement being perhaps an open warning to Athenians not to venture to Sicily across the open sea.

<sup>257</sup> Thukydides 6.27.

*nomos* inscribed on a stele in the agora.<sup>258</sup> According to Plutarch, moved by the conspirators' intent on a daring, radical venture (ἐπὶ πράγμασι μεγάλοις), the demos reacted to the news in in wrath and fear (ὀργῇ δ' ἄμα καὶ φόβῳ).<sup>259</sup>

It is only after evidence for the blasphemous mockery of the mysteries and the involvement of Alkibiades were brought into the open a few days later, that suspicions became better focused and precise political accusations made. Thukydides describes that the people then became suspicious, developed a belief that the episode was not an isolated act and started considering the conspiracy to disband the demos as part of an oligarchical and tyrannical conspiracy (ξυνωμοσία ὀλιγαρχικῇ καὶ τυραννικῇ).<sup>260</sup> The passage is of importance, as the involvement of the mysteries marked the moment the politically unfocused demos initially reacting to the affair came to define its political stance. The combination of traditional mystic and civic sentiments animated the reaction of the people. The demos' traditional anti-tyrannical stance and its devotion to the cult of Demeter helped the development of something akin to a political definition of the adversary of the polis, oligarchic circles.

While Thukydides does not mention religion in his narration except by implication, Plutarch is explicit in linking the scandal with the sanctity of mystery cults. As reported by Plutarch in detail,<sup>261</sup> the charges against Alkibiades and his fellow conspirators were serious: committing a crime against the two Eleusinian goddess (ἀδικεῖν περὶ τῷ θεῷ, τὴν Δήμητραν καὶ

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<sup>258</sup> Andokides *De Mysteriis*, 96-98.

<sup>259</sup> Plutarch *Life of Alkibiades* 18.

<sup>260</sup> Thukydides 6.60.1.

<sup>261</sup> Plutarch *Life of Alkibiades* 22.



τὴν Κόρην), mimicking the mystic rituals (ἀπομιμούμενον τὰ μυστήρια), and showing them to his companions in his house, wearing the *hierophant's* robe, and calling himself *hierophant*, his friend Polytion and Theodorus *dadouchos* and *keryx*, and addressing the rest of his companions as *mystai* and *epoptai*, against the laws of the Eumolpidai and Kerykes. Whatever the truth about the matter of Alkibiades' involvement, the population felt incensed at the hubristic outrage against the Eleusinian mysteries and supported the measures taken against Alkibiades and his fellows aristocrats. In both Plutarch's and Thukydides' accounts the response was as determined as the shock had been violent.

The association of oligarchic circles to the sacrilege and the suspicions of a conspiracy aimed at establishing tyranny in Athens formed the background of the narration of Alkibiades' return to Athens in 407 in the account of Xenophon and Plutarch.<sup>262</sup> Both narrations confirm the central place held by the Eleusinian mystic cult in Athens. After Alkibiades' trial in absentia was concluded by the confiscation of his property and later by his death penalty, all priests and priestesses were requested by decree to publicly curse the name of Alkibiades. They all obeyed with the exception of one priestess, Theanó, who claimed she had become a priestess to pray, not to curse people.<sup>263</sup> The presumable opposition of the Eleusinian clergy to Alkibiades lasted a long time. When Pisander and other envoys from the Athenian fleet at Samos came to Athens in 412 to put forward Alkibiades' plan to allow him back into the city, change the constitution and have the Persians as allies, Thukydides relates that a number of speakers opposed them in defense of democracy, and that the

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<sup>262</sup> Xenophon *Hellenika* 1.4.12-20; Plutarch *Life of Alkibiades* 33-34.

<sup>263</sup> Plutarch *Life of Alkibiades* 22.4.

Eumolpidai and Kerykes protested on behalf of the Eleusinian mysteries calling upon the gods to avert his recall.<sup>264</sup>

Hostility to Alkibiades on religious and political grounds continued, despite the growing popularity that led to his recall to Athens in 407. Despite the gravity of his betrayal and the damage he had brought on Athens as adviser of the Spartans, at the initiative of Kritias the charges against him were repealed, the *demos* voted that his property be restored to him, he was crowned and proclaimed general in chief with full authority (ἡγεμὼν αὐτοκράτωρ). The Eumolpidai and Kerykes were requested to revoke the curses (ἄρᾶι) they had cursed him with at the command of the people, which they did with one exception, Theodoros the *hierophant* himself. Xenophon has the *hierophant* significantly link the lifting of the curse to his civic and political behaviour, and has him declare “No, I invoked no curses on him if he does no wrong to the polis (εἰ μηδὲν ἄδικεῖ τὴν πόλιν)”.<sup>265</sup>

The epilogue of the scandal stands out in shedding light on the importance of mystery cults in the polis of Athens at the end of the fifth century. Aware that his political fate in Athens depended on his repairing his religious and civic reputation with regard to mystery cults, upon his return in 407 Alkibiades decided to wait until after the Eleusinian festival to join the war with the hundred triremes of which he had been given the command.<sup>266</sup> During his absence, the annual land procession to Eleusis had to be discontinued after the Spartans had occupied and fortified the town of Dekeleia in 413. Dekeleia was a town high on the slopes of the Parnes mountain range that divides Attika

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<sup>264</sup> Thukydides 8.53.

<sup>265</sup> Plutarch *Life of Alkibiades* 33.3.

<sup>266</sup> Plutarch *Life of Alkibiades* 34.2.

from Boiotia. From there the Spartans gained an extensive view of a large part of the Attic plain, of the city of Athens, of the harbour of Piraeus and of the passage between the Pentelikos and Parnes mountain ranges, the land passage between Attika and the north of Greece. From Dekeleia the Spartans could attack the Eleusis procession on open grounds.

Thukydides narrates that it had been Alkibiades himself who had recommended the Spartans to occupy Dekeleia, as the only act that would instil fear in the Athenians.<sup>267</sup> In Thukydides' narration, Alkibiades focused on the material advantage the Spartans would gain among them from the Athenians being barred from the silver mines of Laurion. It is however tempting to suspect that Alkibiades had another motivation: the Spartans' military control over the plain of Attika effectively cut the land communications between Athens and Eleusis. The annual procession to Eleusis had to be abandoned. While initiands and epoptai probably continued their voyage to Eleusis by sea,<sup>268</sup> the Eleusinian festival lost the part of the rituals that was open to the public, the procession by land: "sacrifices, choral dances, and many of the sacred ceremonies usually held on the road, when Iakchos is conducted from Athens to Eleusis, had of necessity been abandoned" notes Plutarch.<sup>269</sup> The procession was a powerful symbol of the cohesion of the polis and of its victory against the Persians at Salamis, as Herodotos attests:<sup>270</sup> as was the case of Miltiades on Paros, disrupting the procession was an act aimed at the heart of Athenians.

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<sup>267</sup> Thukydides 6.91-2.

<sup>268</sup> A highly likely fact: in 408/7 the sanctuary revenues were still high, cf. 2.1.

<sup>269</sup> Plutarch *Life of Alkibiades* 34.3.

<sup>270</sup> Herodotos 8.65.

In an act of repentance and of allegiance to the polis, a solemn and theatrical act to enhance his holiness in the eyes of the gods and his good repute in the minds of men (πρὸς θεῶν ὁσιότητα καὶ πρὸς ἀνθρώπων δόξαν),<sup>271</sup> Alkibiades then led the renewed annual procession by land to Eleusis, under the protection of his army, as his first public act after his return to Athens in 407.<sup>272</sup> Plutarch describes the scene in detail, emphasising the religious rituals that Alkibiades set up. After having secured the way with his army, he led the group of Mystai, priests and mystagogues to Eleusis. The procession marched, perhaps unnaturally given the joyous and loud way the Eleusis procession used to walk, in an orderly fashion and in silence (ἐν κόσμῳ καὶ μετὰ σιωπῆς), terms that mark the behaviour of the initiates we noted in 1.1. It was a sacred and devout spectacle (θέαμα σεμνὸν καὶ θεοπρεπές). Plutarch emphasises the desperate plight Athens was in, not able to control the Aegean Sea, banned from her own suburbs, torn by *stasis* (στασιάζουσα). After the procession to Eleusis, Plutarch makes the political conflict clear: so moved were those who had not been his political enemies, that they hailed the man they had hitherto considered a sacrilegious criminal as *hierophant* and *mystagogue* of the Eleusinian cult.<sup>273</sup> The humbler and poorer people claimed Alkibiades should have been made tyrant, a project the most powerful people (οἱ δυνατώτατοι) rejected, and sent him away with the fleet he had demanded. Given the horror the Athenians felt for tyranny, this observation seems paradoxical, evidence for the demos' frustration at the inability of the democratic regime to win the war, as extreme as to wish for a return to a tyrannical regime, thus radically reversing their

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<sup>271</sup> Plutarch *Life of Alkibiades* 34.4.

<sup>272</sup> Xenophon *Hellenika* 1.4.20.

<sup>273</sup> Plutarch *Life of Alkibiades* 34.5.

former hatred of Alkibades' ambition of tyranny.<sup>274</sup> In Xenophon's report the emphasis is on opinions favourable to Alkibiades' return, noting in detail their reasons (1.4.13-17), while he devotes one sentence to those fearing that Alkibiades was going to be responsible for the ills about to befall the polis. Still, the figure of Alkibiades had divided the polis again, as it had done in Samos in 412 when the Athenian generals discussed his return and debated Alkibiades request for a return to oligarchy.

To sum this up, the development and conclusion of the Herms and mysteries affair witnesses three major themes intertwine in the perception of the Athenians. The first is the strength of the popular veneration for the Eleusinian mysteries; the second is the growing connotation of oligarchic circles as opponents of religion and as threat to democracy; the third is the probably not yet clearly defined association of mystery cults with the polis' democratic and anti-tyrannical ideology of equality.

## 4.2 The Arginousai trial and the Apaturia Festival.

The suspicions and fears the Athenians manifested in 415 materialised in the oligarchic coup of 411. The coup had the effect of polarising the political life of Athenians and, after the return to a full democratic constitution in 410, to push the demos towards a clearer perception of the anti-tyrannical and anti-oligarchic foundations of its political stance, as evidenced for instance by the decree of Demophantos (see 5.4). Still, the political atmosphere in Athens remained tense, in particular in regard to the attachment of the Athenians to

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<sup>274</sup> Thukydides 6.15.4.

their religious and civic rituals. In this chapter I shall explore the religious and political implications of the trial of some of the generals who led the fleet at the victorious battle at Arginousai, which sheds light on the strength of religious sentiments in Athens in the autumn of 406, a few months before the performance of *Bakchai* and *Frogs*.

By that time, Athens was showing its strategic weakness on the war front. The fleet had been under the command of competent generals under the leadership of Alkibiades, such as Theramenes, Thrasyboulos and Thrasyllus until the battle of Notium. Under their command the Athenians had been able to reconquer parts of the northern coast of Asia Minor. On Lydian and Carian shores many extremely rich communities flourished, such as Phokaia, Ephesos, Knidos, Kolophon and Miletos, former members of the Athenian league, poleis that had financed the war effort but that had gradually abandoned their allegiance to Athens, allies that were vital to the Athenian war effort, poleis that Athens was now in a position to reconquer.<sup>275</sup> But the Athenian defeat at the battle of Notium in 406 had provoked the self-exile of Alkibiades,<sup>276</sup> and the removal from command of Theramenes and Thrasyboulos.<sup>277</sup> Despite the removal of Alkibiades and the appointment of new generals, in the summer of 406 the battle of Arginousai, small islets attached to the coast of Asia Minor in front of the island of Lesbos,<sup>278</sup> was a further Athenian victory, but very costly in terms of loss of ships and men.<sup>279</sup> The location of the battle attests the weakness of the Athenian war effort after Notium, as the Athenians had withdrawn from their

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<sup>275</sup> A comprehensive treatment of Athens' military and financial renaissance in the period in Andrewes 1992 pp. 481-491.

<sup>276</sup> Diodoros 13.74.4.

<sup>277</sup> Xenophon *Hellenika* 1.5.16.

<sup>278</sup> Today Kalem and Garip Adasi.

<sup>279</sup> Strauss 1986 pp. 179-182 puts the losses at 500 hoplites and 1,147 thetes.

attempts to control the coast of northern Asia Minor and were concentrating on beating Spartan efforts to chase them from the Bosporos, key to Athens' food supply.<sup>280</sup>

Tensions in the city remained high in the period after the fall of the Four Hundred, as Lysias writes (25.25). These conflicts polarised public opinion and political actors. Political assassinations became a tool to assert political views, as it last happened with the murder of Ephialtes in the 460's.<sup>281</sup> When Alkibiades returned to Piraeus on the wake of his success to free the Hellespont in 407 for instance, despite the popularity of his recall that called a crowd of people to Piraeus, he feared he may have been assassinated once on land.<sup>282</sup> Only once he saw a crowd of his friends and political allies, among which was his cousin, assembled in the crowd did he dare to land.<sup>283</sup>

The trial and execution of some of the generals<sup>284</sup> after the battle took place in the autumn of 406 during the Apatouria festival. The outcome of the trial and its context are evidence for the continuing religious, civic and political conflict in the polis of Athens despite recent and seemingly decisive military victories, and of the polis' attachment to democratic values and religious beliefs. Two points are of importance when examining the religious context of the trial: the charges against the generals and the coincidence of the trial and the festival of

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<sup>280</sup> The debate is still active on the question of the importance of grain imports to Athens in the fifth century, cf. Moreno 2007, Oliver 2007, and Braund's 2012 review of these works.

<sup>281</sup> Among the victims were Androkles and Hyperbolos, leaders of the democrats, Phrynichos, a moderate among the Four Hundred (Thukydides 8.82.2, 8.73), soon to be followed by the false charges and judicial murder of Kleophon (Lysias 13.12)

<sup>282</sup> Xenophon *Hellenika* 1.4.12-20; Plutarch *Life of Alkibiades* 33-34.

<sup>283</sup> Xenophon *Hellenika* 1.4.18-19.

<sup>284</sup> Six of the eight fleet generals originally in charge at the battle: Aristokrates, Diomedon, Perikles junior, Erasinides, Protomachos, Thrasyllus, Lysias and Aristogenes. Protomachos and Aristogenes did not return to Athens.

Apatouria. What were the generals accused of? Contemporary sources diverge. Xenophon reports that they were held responsible for not having sailed as ordered to the aid of the disabled vessels and save the men on board them,<sup>285</sup> that is, they were responsible for having left the crews of the disabled ships unaided in the storm.<sup>286</sup> The charge is repeated later by the Boule's proposal to judge the generals "for not picking up the men who won the victory in the naval battle".<sup>287</sup> Diodoros, basing himself probably on Ephoros and on the author of the "P" manuscript fragments in the *Hellenika Oxyrhynchia*,<sup>288</sup> tells a markedly different story. For Diodoros, after the battle some of the generals thought that the fleet should pick up the dead, since the Athenians were going to be incensed at those who allow the dead to go unburied. But a great storm that arose prevented them to do so.<sup>289</sup> Diodoros' version of the motivation of the generals and of their expectation of the rage of the Athenians at their leaving the dead unburied sounds in line with the attachment of the Athenians for religious rituals. This version is also confirmed by Plato, who at the time of the affair was in his early twenties and possibly a witness of the trial: in *Menexenos*, he described the valour of the Athenian crews who had won many battles but who at Arginousai met with undeserved misfortune and were not recovered from the sea to find their burial in Athens.<sup>290</sup> Diodoros further comments on the judgment of the ekklesia stating that the ekklesia had

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<sup>285</sup> Xenophon *Hellenika* 1.6.35, 2.3.32.

<sup>286</sup> It should be noted that the order was impossible to execute. As any sailor who has sailed the Aegean knows, northerly gales can be there extremely violent in summer, reaching 8 or 9 in the Beaufort scale, dangerous even to today's largest ships. In view of the weather, trying the difficult and perilous manoeuvre to fetch bodies in the water would have sunk the fleet, or delivered it in the hands of Spartans at Phokaia and Kyme.

<sup>287</sup> Xenophon *Hellenika* 1.7.9.

<sup>288</sup> See for a discussion of sources Andrewes 1974 pp. 119-120; 1992 p. 481-2.

<sup>289</sup> Diodoros Siculus 13.100.

<sup>290</sup> Plato *Menexenus* 243c.



condemned to death the victorious generals at Arginousai because they had failed to bury the man who had died in the battle.<sup>291</sup>

Most scholars have followed Xenophon's version, although it makes less sense than Diodoros'.<sup>292</sup> What moved the ekklesia to condemn collectively the generals to death? As a consequence of following Xenophon's version, the trial has been largely regarded as the result of popular hysteria,<sup>293</sup> of the violence and terror inspired by the demos,<sup>294</sup> and a procedure that was "unjust, much regretted, and probably illegal".<sup>295</sup> Little noted by scholars,<sup>296</sup> and found "surprising" by Andrewes,<sup>297</sup> Diodoros' version makes the demos' drastic decision comprehensible and in line with the religious feelings we have been following so far. Far from being what Andrewes calls a "disastrous misunderstanding" between two set of political opponents, the decision of the ekklesia, although radical and possibly illegal on procedural grounds, was steeped in Greek religious beliefs.

The sacred duty to bury the dead in religious rituals was famously fundamental to the self-identity and cohesion of the polis.<sup>298</sup> More than the loss of the

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<sup>291</sup> Diodoros Siculus 15.35.

<sup>292</sup> Among them Roberts 1977, Lang 1990, Gish 2012. Andrewes 1992 p. 492-493, while accepting Diodoros' version as a better guide to the motivation of the Athenians, nevertheless follows Xenophon's rendition of the trial.

<sup>293</sup> Andrewes 1992 p. 493.

<sup>294</sup> Ostwald 1986 p. 441.

<sup>295</sup> Roberts 1977 p. 111.

<sup>296</sup> With the exception for instance of Seaford 1994 p. 83, n. 34 and Rubel 2000.

<sup>297</sup> Andrewes, 1992, p. 492, n. 60.

<sup>298</sup> See for instance Sophokles' *Antigone* and Sourvinou-Inwood's 1989 pp. 134-148 innovative interpretation of the play, cf. also Parker 1983 chapter 2. It may also be worthwhile quoting in full Vernant's treatment of the impiety of leaving corpses unburied: « Le morcellement du cadavre, dont les débris sont dispersés ici et là, culmine dans la pratique évoquée dès les premiers vers de l'Iliade et rappelée tout au long du poème, de livrer le corps en pâture aux chiens, aux oiseaux, aux poissons. L'outrage porte ici l'horreur à son comble. Le corps est mis en pièces en même temps

survivors, the demos mourned the unburied heroes of the battle, an impious breach of the unwritten law on the burials of fallen warriors Athenians regarded as divine.<sup>299</sup> The accounts of Xenophon and Diodoros describe vividly the state of mind of the demos in the ekklesia: furious, violent and intolerant. One term Diodoros uses for the wrath of the ekklesia is “fury”, ὀργή,<sup>300</sup> the same word Thukydides uses to describe the state of mind of the demos during the scandal of the Herms,<sup>301</sup> revelatory of a nuance in the crowd’s sentiment, that of pious outrage at a sacrilegious act. Not only was the denial of funerary ritually impious, but it would have caused *miasma* to the whole community. Funeral rituals were a way of purifying the community of the pollution caused by death, and collective purification rituals strengthened civic cohesion and created *homonoia*, as had been the case of the rituals established by Epimenides in the polis of Athens gripped by *stasis* that we observed in 3.1.<sup>302</sup>

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que dévoré tout cru au lieu d’être livré au feu qui, en le brûlant, le restitue dans l’intégralité de sa forme à l’au-delà. Le héros dont le corps est ainsi livré à la voracité des bêtes sauvages est exclu de la mort en même temps que déchu de la condition humaine. Il ne franchit pas les portes de l’Hadès, faute d’avoir eu sa « part de feu » ; il n’a pas de lieu de sépulture, pas de tertre ni de sema, pas de corps funéraire localisé, marquant, pour le groupe social, le point de la terre où il se trouve situé, et où se perpétuent ses rapports avec son pays, sa lignée, sa descendance, ou même simplement les passants. Vernant 1982 pp. 68-9.

<sup>299</sup> As was the case of the religious motivations of the reaction of the demos to the 415 scandals, Grote may be possibly nearer the mark than most modern historians (Grote 1850 Vol. VIII, p. 279-280): “The men, ... inflamed into preternatural and overwhelming violence by the festival of the Apatouria, where all the religious traditions connected with the ancient family tie, all those associations which imposed upon the relatives of a murdered man the duty of pursuing the murderer, were expanded into detail and worked up by their appropriate renovating solemnity. The garb of mourning and the shaving of the head—phenomena unknown at Athens either in a political assembly or in a religious festival—were symbols of temporary transformation in the internal man. He could think of nothing but his drowning relatives, together with the generals as having abandoned them to death, and his own duty as survivor to ensure to them vengeance and satisfaction for such abandonment”.

<sup>300</sup> Diodoros Siculus 13.101.4

<sup>301</sup> Thukydides 6.60.2.

<sup>302</sup> For thorough discussions of *miasma* versus death rituals with rich ancient sources see Parker 1983 chapter 2 and Seaford 1994 chapter 3.

The other significant point of difference between the two accounts regards the treatment of the Apatouria worshippers and their influence on the ekklesia. Xenophon presents the crowd of the Apatouria festival who attended the meeting at the ekklesia dressed in black, in deep mourning, their heads shaved, people whom Theramenes convinced to pretend to be kinsmen of those who had perished<sup>303</sup> in order to put the ekklesia under pressure. Diodoros instead presents them more credibly as genuine mourners and relatives of the dead, who appeared in the assembly in mourning garments begging the demos to punish those who had allowed men who had died on behalf of their country to go unburied.<sup>304</sup>

Xenophon's attention is on politics, Diodoros' on religion. The Apatouria was one of the fundamental festivals in the life of families, as they approved the entry of boys, once they reached the age of three, then again at puberty as ephebes, and at marriage, into the phratry of his family, the social and religious unit of the community that approved access to civic rights and registration of boys into the citizenship status.<sup>305</sup> The festival lasted three days, one of the longest and most popular in Attika, and was the occasion for the ritual expression and enactment of solidarity and bonding between members of the region's phratries, to which all citizens belonged. The death toll at Arginousai had been high as the fleet had lost twenty-five triremes, and it is likely that a large number of families had been mourning dead and missing relatives during the meetings of the ekklesia to judge the generals.

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<sup>303</sup> Xenophon *Hellenika* 1.8.8.

<sup>304</sup> Diodoros Siculus 13.101.6

<sup>305</sup> Burkert 1985, p. 237; 255; Parker 1996 pp. 104-108; 2005 p. 458 ff.

In Diodoros' account the Arginousai trial had shown evidence for the strong attachment of the demos of Athens to the polis' traditional unwritten laws and to its religious and civic rituals. The trial had also shown how deeply divisive a traditional issue such as the denial of burial rituals could be, and how forceful the reaction of the demos was capable of being when facing what it perceived as an impious violation of rituals, as it had happened in the case of the mysteries scandal in 415 (cf. 4.1).<sup>306</sup> The tension between the demos, openly defending religious principles and asserting their democratic rights above all considerations,<sup>307</sup> the generals and those who attempted to defend them, such as Theramenes and Euryptolemos. The conflict at the trial was probably only the visible part of a larger dissatisfaction of the demos with the decision to grant freedom and citizenship to the slaves manning the fleet. As argued by Hunt<sup>308</sup> and Asmonti<sup>309</sup>, the exceptional steps taken by the Athenians in conferring citizenship on metics and any other foreigner who were willing to fight with them undermined the traditional social and economic order of the polis, and is likely to have caused discontent, particularly in view of the losses caused by the battle. A further motive for the tension may well be linked to the social figures of some of the generals. Theramenes, one of trierarchs at the battle, had been one the main architects of the constitution of the 5,000 that replaced the 400 regime in 411,<sup>310</sup> and not a friend of democrats, as his subsequent role in installing the Thirty in power demonstrates; Perikles junior and Euryptolemos, the man who attempted to defend the generals before the ekklesia, belonged to one of the richest and most influential families in Athens,

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<sup>306</sup> Still, as Gish notes, the details of the trial in Xenophon's thorough account show that the demos moved with great attention to legal institutions and democratic procedures (Gish 2012 p. 202).

<sup>307</sup> Xenophon *Hellenika* 1.7.12.

<sup>308</sup> Hunt 2001 pp. 359-380.

<sup>309</sup> Asmonti 2006 pp. 1-21.

<sup>310</sup> Diodoros 13.38.2, 42.2.

the Alkmaionids; Aristokrates was a man of wealth and influence<sup>311</sup> and had been a member of the Four Hundred;<sup>312</sup> Diomedon was a friend of Alkibiades, Thrasyllus and Thrasyboulos, a group that had few allies amongst the radical democrats;<sup>313</sup> Erasinides was not a friend of the democrats, and one of them, Archedemos, had brought him to justice for embezzling public funds he had received while commanding a fleet in the Hellespont.<sup>314</sup> The religious motive of the condemnation of the generals was thus also founded on the social and political conflict between the demos and people perceived as oligarchs.

### 4.3 The Overthrow of the Thirty in Xenophon.

A further episode in Athenian political life confirms the tension that was felt in Athens in the period when *Bakchai* and *Frogs* were produced and the division it produced among the people of the polis. As the Spartan Lysander and his fleet blockaded Piraeus after the Athenian defeat at Aigospotamoi in the fall of 405, a few months after the performances of the plays, the conflict between oligarchs and the demos erupted. Oligarchic circles took profit of the moment and attacked Kleophon, one of the leaders of the demos, and had him condemned to death by a rigged jury of oligarchs.<sup>315</sup> At some point in the spring-summer-early fall of 404 Athens finally agreed to surrender to the Spartans, and the regime of the Thirty was established in the polis.<sup>316</sup> In his detailed narrative of

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<sup>311</sup> Plato *Gorgias* 472.

<sup>312</sup> Thukydides 8.89, 92.

<sup>313</sup> Andrewes 1953 p. 3.

<sup>314</sup> Xenophon *Hellenika* 7.1.2.

<sup>315</sup> Lysias 13.5-12.

<sup>316</sup> Cf. for instance Stem 2003 p. 18 for a discussion on the date.

the rise and fall of the regime of the Thirty in *Hellenika*,<sup>317</sup> probably written a half-century after the facts, Xenophon concentrates on the “paradigmatic”<sup>318</sup> conflict between democratic and religious sentiments of Athenians and the lawlessness, impiousness and rapacity of the regime of the Thirty, a theme that is expressed in a subtext of democratic and Eleusinian values that has been mostly unnoticed by scholars.

I focus in this section on Xenophon’s rendering of this civic and religious conflict through the speeches that Xenophon puts in the mouths of its protagonists, Kritias on the one hand, and on the other Theramenes, Thrasyboulos and Kleokritos. The passage is a further example of the pattern we observed in parts 3 and 4 of this work, the association of Eleusinian mystic values with opposition to tyranny and to *stasis* on one hand and civic and religious reconciliation on the other, the Athenian values that form the context of the political and mystic content of *Bakchai* and *Frogs*. In this logic the value of Xenophon’s account of the Thirty regime and its fall is not so much as a writer of “historical” facts, but as a contribution to the understanding of the Athenian democratic ethic and civic discourse that animates his educational tale, in which Xenophon mixes fiction, historical facts and characters into his moral and political discourse.<sup>319</sup> As Dillery puts it, the passage in Xenophon dedicated to the rise and fall of the Thirty is of particular use to historians as it “reflects the intellectual climate of the day”.<sup>320</sup>

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<sup>317</sup> Xenophon *Hellenika* 2.3.11 – 2.4.43. It was probably written after the battle of Mantinea (362), cf. Dillery 1995 p. 14.

<sup>318</sup> Cf. Krentz 1995 p. 122. See also Dillery 1995 pp. 146-163.

<sup>319</sup> Cf. V. Gray 1989 p. 7.

<sup>320</sup> Dillery 1995 p. 8.

While the connections between Xenophon's depiction of the Thirty as impious oligarchs turning into tyrants, the occurrence of *stasis*, and its solution through Eleusinian values is vital for understanding the passage, few scholars have noticed it. As Bowden notes, there has been little study of the theme of Xenophon and religion.<sup>321</sup> While Loraux for instance puts the speech of Kleokritos at the centre of her 1997 analysis of the subject of *stasis* and reconciliation as essential components of Athenian politics, she disappointingly fails to focus on the religious aspects of the passage. Attention to the Eleusinian associations in the passage would have made easier her search for an answer to the question on the reason why the democrats in Athens chose not to take revenge on their political opponents but to embrace the values of peace and reconciliation.<sup>322</sup>

In a manner not dissimilar to Euripides' dramatic construction of the figure of Pentheus the tyrant that we shall observe in 5.4, Xenophon builds up gradually the characterisation of the Thirty as greedy, violent and impious tyrants whose rule produces *stasis*. The connection between greed, hubris and lawlessness as features of tyranny was one of the cornerstones of Athenian civic consciousness,<sup>323</sup> and strengthens the depiction of the Thirty as the enemies of the polis. Initially presented as elected by the demos among oligarchic circles to draw up the *patrioi nomoi* under which the polis would have been organised and ruled,<sup>324</sup> the Thirty's progression to absolute power and personal rule is

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<sup>321</sup> Bowden 2004 p. 229.

<sup>322</sup> Loraux 1997. Azoulay 2014 pp. 689-719 produces a critique of Loraux' approach to a reading of the episode from a political theory angle but overlooks entirely its religious inspiration and implications. Other useful studies on Xenophon's political and religious outlook include Krentz 1995, Skoczylas Pownall 1998, Seager 2001, and V. Gray 1989 and 2003.

<sup>323</sup> Cf. for instance, Solon fragment 4; Plato *Republic* 351d.

<sup>324</sup> Xenophon *Hellenika* 2.3.2.

described as fast and ruthless. Xenophon draws the progress of the rule and the fall of the Thirty through the conflict between the figures of the tyrant Kritias and three characters, Theramenes, Thrasyboulos and Kleokritos. The order in which these characters oppose Kritias is revelatory of Xenophon's religious and political credo. The first opponents of the Thirty is one of them, Theramenes, whose opposition is not based on the merits of the oligarchic cause, but on the excesses of their rule. His figure and his death at the hand of Kritias are used by Xenophon to illustrate the futility of opposing the Thirty through constitutional means. Second comes Thrasyboulos, a democrat who chose armed struggle to fight against the Thirty, but whose ultimate goal is revenge.<sup>325</sup> Thrasyboulos' political stance is thus qualified on ethical grounds: killing in revenge can only cause more killing in revenge, the endless cycle that Athena stopped in Aeschylus' *Eumenides*. The Eleusinian theme of putting an end to *stasis* and of putting into effect a reconciliation of all Athenians is instead at the centre of the speech of the Eleusinian Keryx Kleokritos, whose speech effectively concludes the conflict in Xenophon's tale and opens an era of civic peace.

Xenophon's choice of Kritias as leader of the Thirty and as the arch-villain of the episode is not casual. Xenophon had a low opinion of Kritias, and he had called Kritias the greediest and most violent of the oligarch.<sup>326</sup> Kritias' political past did nothing to contradict Xenophon's opinion. He had been arrested in connection with the affair of the Herms, then freed on Andokides' evidence.<sup>327</sup> After the fall of the Four Hundred he had prosecuted for treason Phrynichos, one of the organisers of the Four Hundred coup who had been murdered by

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<sup>325</sup> Xenophon *Hellenika* 2.4.17.

<sup>326</sup> Xenophon *Memorabilia* 1.2.12.

<sup>327</sup> Andokides *de Mysteriis* 47, 68.



political opponents;<sup>328</sup> he was exiled under the democratic regime and returned only after Athens' surrender to Sparta to organise the overthrow of democracy.<sup>329</sup>

The theme of tyranny and of its un-civic and impious characteristics that Xenophon associates with the Thirty is set out at the beginning of the episode. Xenophon is careful to lay out a progression towards the Thirty's tyrannical behaviour. Firstly, following the traditional pattern of would-be tyrants in the Athenian imagination, the Thirty called upon the Spartans to send troops in order to be able to do with the polis what they wanted, in a manner similar to Kylon and his Megarian allies (see 3.1) and the suspicion Herodotos puts on Miltiades because of his Thracian allies (see 3.3).<sup>330</sup>

Secondly, the long exchange of political speeches by Kritias and Theramenes is preceded by a short but revelatory exchange between the two on the subject of tyranny.<sup>331</sup> As Xenophon has Theramenes observe that it was unfair to put a man to death solely because he was honoured by the demos, Kritias answered that it would have been foolish for the Thirty, who wished to claim more than their due (πλεονεκτεῖν) not to act as one tyrant.<sup>332</sup> Xenophon has Kritias define to the Boule regime of the Thirty as an oligarchy, thus marking the amalgamation of the two political terms that we observed in Thukydides'

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<sup>328</sup> Lykourgos *Leokrates* 1.112-3.

<sup>329</sup> Lysias 12 *Against Eratosthenes* 43-6.

<sup>330</sup> Xenophon *Hellenika* 2.3.13.

<sup>331</sup> Interestingly analysed by Dillery 1995 pp. 148-156.

<sup>332</sup> Xenophon *Hellenika* 2.3.16 "εἰ δέ, ὅτι τριάκοντά ἐσμεν καὶ οὐχ εἷς, ἥττον τι οἶει ὥσπερ τυραννίδος ταύτης τῆς ἀρχῆς χρῆναι ἐπιμελεῖσθαι, εὐήθης εἶ. "

account of the aftermath of the scandal of the Herms.<sup>333</sup> Kritias' cynical remark hovers over the rest of the episode.

In Xenophon the violence against the Thirty's political adversaries escalated, not only for political reason, but because of personal enmity and for the sake of robbing rich opponents of their wealth.<sup>334</sup> A specific target of the regime's violence for financial gain was the community of metics, to which Lysias' family belonged, an episode that he vividly portrayed in one of his speeches.<sup>335</sup> The greed for financial gain traditionally marks tyrants, as we observed in the figures of Miltiades in 3.3 and of Alkibiades in 4.1. Standard tyrannical behaviour of the Thirty also included the disarming of people, and the formation of a personal bodyguard, this last being the tyrannical feature Herodotos attributed to Miltiades.

As we observed in chapters 3 and 4, disregard for religion and committing acts of sacrilege are one of the features of a tyrant. The last act of Kritias in Xenophon's account before getting killed at the battle of Mounichia is to have his men seize Theramenes despite his standing as a suppliant at the altar of the Bouleuterion, thus breaching the sacred laws on *hiketeia*. Xenophon is here implying the political limits of what he described as Theramenes' lonely fight against Kritias. Theramenes is virtuous, but an oligarch, ready to accept that the polis should be ruled by oligarchs, the cavalry and hoplites, "those capable of service with their horses and shields",<sup>336</sup> but opposed to those who believe that a good oligarchy can only be established by the tyranny of a few men.

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<sup>333</sup> Xenophon *Hellenika* 2.3.24-26.

<sup>334</sup> Xenophon *Hellenika* 2.3.21.

<sup>335</sup> Lysias 12 *Against Eratosthenes*.

<sup>336</sup> Xenophon *Hellenika* 2.3.48 "σὺν τοῖς δυναμένοις καὶ μεθ' ἵππων καὶ μετ' ἀσπίδων ὠφελεῖν".

Impious and unjust men cannot be stopped by any individual, even if he is in the right and has the impotent solidarity of the Boule, Xenophon seems to imply,<sup>337</sup> leaving the solution to the Eleusinian reconciliation promoted by Kleokritos. Xenophon describes the end of Theramenes' life in a religious and dramatic way, as he puts in the mouth of Theramenes a religious cry, as he called to the gods as witnesses to this impious act of the Thirty, the most unjust and impious of men.<sup>338</sup>

Resistance to the Thirty was then led by Thrasyboulos of the deme of Steiria, whom Xenophon makes the protagonist of the democratic movement that leads to the fall of the Thirty. Thrasyboulos was a good choice for his role, a man whose democratic credentials Thukydides narrates. He had helped the democrats in Samos to beat the oligarchic faction in the island and, together with Thrasyllus, was one of the leaders of the Samos anti-oligarchic revolution in 411. After the victory the demos of the island had showed mercy, putting to death thirty oligarchs and according an amnesty to the others, and lived henceforth in harmony under a democratic government.<sup>339</sup> When, some time later, the Samians heard the news of the 411 Four Hundred coup in Athens, Thrasyboulos and Thrasyllus made all soldiers in the island swear an oath to accept a democratic government, to live in harmony (δημοκρατήσεσθαί τε καὶ ὁμολογήσειν), and to continue the war against Sparta.<sup>340</sup> A valiant general, Thrasyboulos is described as fighting against the Spartans together with Alkibiades in the north Aegean. He fought at Kynossema, Abydos and at

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<sup>337</sup> Xenophon *Hellenika* 2.3.50.

<sup>338</sup> Xenophon *Hellenika* 2.3.53. Cf. Gould 1973 p. 83. Gould too falls in the trap of considering Xenophon as a neutral observer of historical events.

<sup>339</sup> Thukydides 8.73.4-6.

<sup>340</sup> Thukydides 8.75.2.

Kyzikos and Arginousai, major victories of the Athenian fleet.<sup>341</sup> Unmentioned by Xenophon but by the author/s of the *Constitution of the Athenians* an episode concerning Thrasyboulos completes his democratic credentials and gives an insight on the radicality of his views.<sup>342</sup> After the overthrow of the Thirty Thrasyboulos proposed a decree giving full citizens' rights to all those who had supported him and other democratic exiles in overthrowing the Thirty and re-instituting the democratic constitution after the 403 amnesty. Thrasyboulos' decree was thus strongly egalitarian as among the men who had joined forces with Thrasyboulos from Piraeus some were clearly slaves (ἐνιοι φανερώς ἦσαν δοῦλοι),<sup>343</sup> while others *xenoi* and foreigners, people of every kind, (παντοδαποί),<sup>344</sup> probably a thousand in all.<sup>345</sup> It is interesting also to note that Thrasyboulos' egalitarian appeal follows the same lines of the political appeal of Aristophanes in *Frogs* 700-702 that we shall analyse in 5.10.

Noticed briefly by both Diodoros and Lysias,<sup>346</sup> an episode involving the Thirty' violence against Eleusis opens Xenophon's Eleusinian discourse on the overthrow of the impious Thirty.<sup>347</sup> Headed by Kritias, the Thirty, scared of the success of Thrasyboulos and of his democratic followers in repulsing their attacks on his fortress of Phyle, decided to occupy Eleusis as possible haven from a democratic revolt. They went to Eleusis, assembled Eleusis' adult male inhabitants for a military review and had horsemen arrest them. They were then put to judgement in Athens' Odeion. The trial was conducted by troops

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<sup>341</sup> Thukydides, 8.105-6, Xenophon *Hellenika* 1.1, Diodoros Siculus 13.50.4-7. Cf. also Rhodes 1981 pp. 429-430.

<sup>342</sup> *Constitution of the Athenians* 40.2.

<sup>343</sup> *Constitution of the Athenians* 40.2.

<sup>344</sup> Xenophon *Hellenika* 2.4.25.

<sup>345</sup> See Ostwald 1986 p. 503-4: see also Raubitschek 1941 pp. 284-295; Taylor 2002 pp. 377-397.

<sup>346</sup> Diodoros 14.32.4; Lysias 12.52.

<sup>347</sup> Xenophon *Hellenika* 2.4.8-10.

loyal to the Thirty, in the presence of Spartan troops who filled half the Odeion space. The Eleusinians were condemned and put to death. Xenophon's detailed account of the massacre of the men of military age in Eleusis is designed to create an expectation of a reaction from the Athenians, for whom Eleusis was the seat of the revered cult of the two goddesses and a polis they controlled, a reaction similar to that of the scandal of the mysteries in 415.

Xenophon is vague about the number<sup>348</sup> and identity of the executed Eleusinians, but at least one of the priests, Kleokritos the Keryx, joined the democrats' resistance under the leadership of Thrasyboulos. He is a man whom Xenophon describes as herald of the Eleusinian mystery cult and a man of good voice (ὁ τῶν μυστῶν κῆρυξ, μάλ' εὐφωνος ὢν).<sup>349</sup> In his function as herald announcing the opening of the Eleusis festivals to the crowd in the agora, Kleokritos would have been a well-known figure to Athenians, and is mentioned twice by Aristophanes, once in connection with mystery cults.<sup>350</sup>

The speech Xenophon has Thrasyboulos make before the battle that opposed the Thirty's troops to the democrats on the hillock of Mounichia in Piraeus, is explicitly steeped in the terms and sentiments that are at the same time civic and religious.<sup>351</sup> Haranguing explicitly his followers not as soldiers, but formally as citizens (ἄνδρες πολῖται), Thrasyboulos put emphasis on the fact

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<sup>348</sup> Krentz 1995, p. 142 estimates the figure of 584 as the full Athenian citizens in Eleusis, and Lysias mentions the figure of 300 being arrested.

<sup>349</sup> Xenophon *Hellenika* 2.4.20.

<sup>350</sup> In *Birds* 876-7 Aristophanes invokes the Great Mother of gods and men, Kybele the Ostrich, mother of Kleokritos, δέσποινα Κυβέλη, στρουθί, μήτηρ Κλεοκρίτου.

<sup>351</sup> Xenophon *Hellenika* 2.4.13-17.

that divinity was now favouring his party.<sup>352</sup> Xenophon is here emphasising the divine favour (εὐδαιμονία) his force enjoys, as opposed to the figure of Theramenes who is described as an isolated opponent of the Thirty. The gods have assisted us, Thrasyboulos says, with a snow storm,<sup>353</sup> and allowed us victories over superior forces in the past. The gods themselves are openly fighting today with us (οἱ θεοί ... νῦν φανερώς ἡμῖν συμμαχοῦσι), as the Thirty persecute people who had done nothing against the law. Gods have shown again their favour by putting us democrats in a very favourable position to fight against a superior force, as we democrats are on the top of the steep hillock of Mounichia facing down the enemy. In the finale of the speech Xenophon has Thrasyboulos use Eleusinian concepts in his speech, by means of several terms connected to the mysteries as their definition of mystic bliss and of the initiates' collective cohesion, terms we shall analyse in their context in the discussion on *Bakchai* and *Frogs* in chapter 5 of this work. Thrasyboulos ends his speech to his troops in a solemn *makarismos*, proclaiming as blessed (μακάριοι) those who will win the battle and he who will fall as blessed by the gods (εὐδαίμων). In Thrasyboulos' final words Xenophon emphasise the antithesis between the solidarity of initiates/democrats and the tyrants' hubris. When the propitious moment will come,<sup>354</sup> he, Thrasyboulos, will intone the paeon and all in accord (πάντες ὁμοθυμαδόν), will bring revenge against those men from whom we have suffered violence (ὑβρίσθημεν).

Xenophon's emphasis on divinity hovers over the ensuing battle. Having foreseen his own death as the price to be paid for victory, Xenophon writes, the

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<sup>352</sup> Divine interventions are viewed by Xenophon as punishing the impious, cf. for instance *Hellenika* 5.4.1. Cf. also Skoczylas Pownall 1998 pp. 2511-277 and Krentz 1995 pp. 144-5.

<sup>353</sup> Possibly Ephoros' evidence, as it is mentioned by Diodoros in 14.32.2.

<sup>354</sup> Xenophon *Hellenika* 2.4.17. Cf. for instance Aeschylus *Seven against Thebes* 1.

mantis who was with Thrasyboulos led the charge and was killed instantly, after which the attack of the democrats was massive and victorious.<sup>355</sup> The battle was won and Kritias was among the fallen. Following the battle, the survivors in the camps of the democrats and that of the Thirties remained mingled together and talked while the democrats were giving the bodies of the fallen partisans of the Thirty back to their companions.

At this crucial and bizarre moment of tense mixing of victors and defeated, Xenophon marks the apparition and speech of Kleokritos. In Xenophon's account, the figure Kleokritos embodies the values of mystery cults and makes his speech to the crowd share some of the characteristics of the speech the Keryx made to the *mystai* at during initiation rituals.<sup>356</sup> His figure stands in the background of the massacre of Eleusinian citizens Xenophon had described in detail: he was a survivor of that sacrilegious action, and appears in his sacred role of Keryx in strong contrast to the impiousness of the Thirty. As befits a Keryx of the *mystai*, Kleokritos first called the crowd to silence, that essential opening address of religious ceremonies. Kleokritos then proceeded to make a speech directed at the soldiers of the Thirty.<sup>357</sup> It is a speech of reconciliation, "a minor masterpiece", as V. Gray calls it,<sup>358</sup> a plea for peace in a "mood of solemn grandeur".

Xenophon has Kleokritos use the same political address (ἄνδρες πολῖται) as Thrasyboulos to speak to the Thirty's troops and has him focus not on the vengeance that Thrasyboulos had promised but on the need for the two parties

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<sup>355</sup> Xenophon *Hellenika* 2.4.18.

<sup>356</sup> Foucart 1914 p. 203.

<sup>357</sup> Xenophon *Hellenika* 2.4.20-22.

<sup>358</sup> Gray 1989 p. 101-3.

to reconcile their differences.<sup>359</sup> The difference between the political content of the two speeches is of importance, as it centres on the passage from violent retribution to peaceful reconciliation as founding principle of the community of the polis. Xenophon here develops his religious and political credo, a concept based not on the concept of divinity supporting the religious democrats as Thrasyboulos had done, but on the religious ties linking all Athenians as a basis for any form of government to rule Athens. The concepts Kleokritos raises are those parallel mystic and civic values that we shall observe in *Bakchai* and *Frogs* as the message of the mystic choruses/*thiasoi* to the polis in chapter 5 of this work.

Kleokritos starts his peroration on a religious tone, in the name of all Athenian fathers' and mothers' gods and ends it on the tears both sides shed for the dead. What is the logic of a civil war, asks Kleokritos, between men who have shared the most solemn religious rituals and sacrificial ceremonies and the finest festivals (ἱερῶν τῶν σεμνοτάτων καὶ θυσιῶν καὶ ἑορτῶν τῶν καλλίστων)? It is a declaration of the primacy of religion over politics, and it comes from the mouth of an Eleusinian high priest and a declared democrat, thus associating the notions of peace to that of the Eleusinian rituals and other religious festivals as experiences common to all the Athenians. Kleokritos' second point emphasises the other aspects of Athenian life that all Athenians had in common, first the activities in choruses, secondly school education, and thirdly companionship in arms. Both parties, Xenophon has Kleokritos claim, have been companions in choruses, have been schoolfellows and fellow-soldiers, (συγχορευταὶ καὶ συμφοιτηταὶ ... καὶ συστρατιῶται), have shared the same

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<sup>359</sup> Not unlike in its conciliatory tone the speech Xenophon puts in the mouth of another Keryx, Kallias, in Xenophon *Hellenika* 6.3.1-6 (see 2.1).



ties of kinship and marriage and fellowship in *hetairiai*, (συγγενείας καὶ κηδεστίας καὶ ἑταιρίας).<sup>360</sup> Kleokritos then asserts the communality of the risks the two parties had run in fighting on land and sea and the communality of their goals; the safety and freedom (σωτηρία καὶ ἐλευθερία) of the polis.

Xenophon, in Kleokritos' powerful finale of his speech, uses solemn religious and ethical terms that express his civic and religious sentiments based on the definition of the ultimate evil that can befall a polis, *stasis*. The antithesis is here between the state of peace and civic cohesion that would exist between citizens if the Thirty had not brought civil war to the polis. The Thirty and their henchmen are explicitly excluded from the reconciliation, as a basis for the peace and concord of the polis, as Euripides in *Bakchai* had made the elimination of Pentheus the basis on which the polis would have found a new Dionysiac harmony, (see 5.4). Echoing Theramenes' final exclamation, Kleokritos calls the Thirty the most impious (ἀνοσιωτάτοι), of men, men who have killed their fellow Athenians for the sake of their private gains (ιδίων κερδέων ἔνεκα), and brought *stasis*, war between fellow citizens, the most dishonourable, most painful, most ungodly, most hateful thing to gods and men.<sup>361</sup>

Some of the same themes are put by Xenophon into the mouth of Thrasyboulos in his speech to the Athenians in the *ekklesia*, after the fall of the regime of the

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<sup>360</sup> Xenophon *Hellenika* 2.4.20. Cf. also for instance Plato's definition of the comradeship between people who have shared being entertained, going through initiation and being initiated (ξενίζειν τε καὶ μυεῖν καὶ ἐποπτεύειν) as the basis of *philia*, in letter 7.333e.

<sup>361</sup> "τὸν πάντων αἰσχιστόν τε καὶ χαλεπώτατον καὶ ἀνοσιώτατον καὶ ἐχθιστόν τε καὶ θεοῖς καὶ ἀνθρώποις πόλεμον ἡμῖν πρὸς ἀλλήλους".

Thirty.<sup>362</sup> Thrasyboulos' speech was delivered after the Spartans had decided that the best policy to adopt in conquered Athens was one of reconciliation, *διάλλαξις*.<sup>363</sup> Democrats, Xenophon stresses, were magnanimous in the victory.<sup>364</sup> All would be allowed to return to their homes, except for the Thirty, the heads of the Thirty militia and the rulers of the Piraeus. The speech of Thrasyboulos, addressed to the formal *ekklesia* of the *demos*,<sup>365</sup> closes the cycle of the speeches of the episode in an openly political way, and contains a theme absent from his first speech and that of Kleokritos, that of democracy.

The speech opens with an address to the men of the city (*ἐκ τοῦ ἄστεως ἄνδρες*), whom he invites to know themselves (*ὕμιν συμβουλεύω ἐγὼ γινῶναι ὑμᾶς αὐτούς*), a Delphic moral injunction. In its literary and philosophical context, the invitation to know oneself is significantly associated by Herakleitos (fr. 116)<sup>366</sup> with that virtue at the centre of civic life, self-control, the self-discipline that the oligarchs had been unable to muster during the Thirty regime. To whom was Thrasyboulos speaking? In his previous speech he had addressed citizens (*ἄνδρες πολῖται*), as Kleokritos had done after the battle. Now the definition of "men of the city" explicitly does not mention the term "polis": Thrasyboulos speaks to those who had remained in the city as opposed to those who had followed him to Piraeus: the oligarchs and those supporting

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<sup>362</sup> Xenophon *Hellenika* 2.4.40-42

<sup>363</sup> Xenophon *Hellenika* 2.4.38. Detailed in the *Constitution of Athenians* 39.1-6. It interestingly mainly deals with the religious, *super partes*, role of the Eleusis sanctuary. The oligarchs fleeing the punishment they expected from the *demos* would be allowed to flee to Eleusis and would be allowed to remain in Eleusis with full citizen and property rights. They however were not allowed back to Athens except for the mysteries festival. The sanctuary at Eleusis was to be common to both communities, under the care of Kerykes and Eumolpidai in accordance with tradition, *κατὰ τὰ πατρία*. Cf. Rhodes 1981 pp. 462-472.

<sup>364</sup> Xenophon *Hellenika* 2.4.38.

<sup>365</sup> Xenophon *Hellenika* 2.4.39.

<sup>366</sup> "ἀνθρώποισι πᾶσι μέτεστι γινώσκειν ἑωυτοὺς καὶ σωφρονεῖν."

them, people not worthy of being called citizens.<sup>367</sup> After having warned them to recognise their own arrogance in believing they were more just than the demos, Thrasyboulos remarks that the demos, while poorer than the oligarchs, had never done any injustice for the sake of gain, while the oligarchs, while richer than anybody else, had been guilty of many disgraceful acts for the sake of it (πολλὰ καὶ αἰσχρὰ ἔνεκα κερδέων). The only virtues Athenians need are to be true to their oaths and religiously pure (εὐορκοὶ καὶ ὅσιοί), two terms and concepts that we shall observe at the heart of civic and religious virtues in *Bakchai* and *Frogs*. Do not stir up *stasis* in the city, warns Thrasyboulos, and obey our old laws, upon which he dismissed the ekklesia. Since then, writes Xenophon, the two parties live together as free citizens (ὁμοῦ τε πολιτεύονται).<sup>368</sup> “Thus ended *stasis* in Athens”, Xenophon concludes.<sup>369</sup>

A parallel version to Xenophon’s account of the episode and his mystic/civic reading of it can be found for instance in a short passage in Plato’s *Menexenos* that strengthens the mystic and civic reading of the episode.<sup>370</sup> After the end of the Peloponnesian war, Plato says, tranquillity (ἡσυχία) reigned in Athens, and peace (εἰρήνη) with her neighbours. But then internal war (ὁ οἰκεῖος πόλεμος) erupted, and peace only returned because Athenians from Piraeus and from Athens mixed readily and in a friendly way and settled the war with moderation (μετρίως). Plato’s use of the term to indicate the absence of tensions in the polis (ἡσυχία), is an expression that Euripides for instance uses

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<sup>367</sup> Cf. Krentz 1995 p. 154.

<sup>368</sup> Xenophon *Hellenika* 2.4.43.

<sup>369</sup> Xenophon *Hellenika* 3.1.1.

<sup>370</sup> Plato *Menexenos* 243e-244b.

in *Bakchai* to describe the cohesion of the polis,<sup>371</sup> while the term for moderate (μέτριος) recalls the theme of rejection of tyranny and anarchy we noted in Aeschylus' *Eumenides* (517-565 and 696-698) (see 3.4) and that we shall encounter in *Bakchai* (see 5.9).

The perception of Athenians of the three historical episodes we have examined so far, is evidence for the way the Athenians perceived the nature of the crisis of Athens in the last months of the Peloponnesian war: a domestic political emergency due to the conflict between the reverence the Athenians felt for their traditional religion and those who threatened it, thereby endangering the cohesion and survival of the polis. The cults of the mysteries and the egalitarian and democratic creed of Athenians were perceived as closely connected, as the orator Isokrates notes that nothing enrages the *polis* more than violations of the mysteries in matters concerning divinity and attempts to overthrow democracy in other matters.<sup>372</sup> Such was the atmosphere in Athens during the writing of *Bakchai* and *Frogs*. The crisis of the polis is seen by Xenophon as essentially a moral and political one, and its solution can only lie in a moral, religious and political reconciliation between all Athenians on lines inspired by mystic values. In the speeches of the protagonists of the rise and fall of the Thirty in Xenophon's *Hellenika*, we found evidence for the pattern of interrelated religious and political concepts that we shall observe at the centre of the political and mystic content of *Bakchai* and *Frogs*.

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<sup>371</sup> ὁ δὲ τᾶς ἡσυχίας βίωτος καὶ τὸ φρονεῖν ... ξυνέχει δώματα "a life of tranquillity holds households together" (389-392).

<sup>372</sup> Isokrates *De Bigis* 6.

## 5 The Plays

We have argued that the development of the complex system of interrelated concepts and terms that came to be known as Athenian civic ideology was correlated to the mystic and political values expressed in the Eleusinian and Dionysiac cults. In this chapter, we shall examine how those mystic, ethical and political themes were treated by Euripides and Aristophanes in *Bakchai* and *Frogs* in the same historical moment. My aim is to show evidence that both authors used similar Eleusinian and Dionysiac religious and civic themes in their plea to strengthen communal cohesion in a moment of deep internal political crisis in Athens.

*Bakchai* and *Frogs* were composed and produced to respond to the political problems of Athens in the last months of the Peloponnesian war. As befits Old Comedy, *Frogs* is directly concerned with the political conflicts in Athens during the period of its production, and satire against popular politicians is direct. As befits tragedy, *Bakchai* is a complex reflection on tyranny and its effects, on civic and religious ethics and has no immediate relation to current events in Athens' political life. The common characteristics of the two plays and their possible performance in the same spring of 405 (see Introduction) are evidence of the plays' authors pleading for the same cause, a civic and religious reconciliation to solve the factional infighting in the polis that was to generate the instauration of an oligarchic regime a year after the production of the plays.

While the case for *Frogs* being composed with an Athenian audience in mind is strong, several questions may arise on the composition of *Bakchai*, a play that Euripides allegedly wrote during his stay at the court of the king of Macedon,

Archelaus. Is this tradition trustworthy? Was *Bakchai* originally intended for a Macedonian public? Did Euripides ever set a foot in Macedon? If so, did he keep in touch with Athenian matters? This matter has been discussed by scholars at length, and not resolved.

The main sources for the life of Euripides are the quotations of the peripatetic third-century writer Satyros in the works of Athenaeus and Diogenes Laërtius, and the fragments of a dialogue by Satyros on the same subject discovered at Oxyrhynchus in 1911.<sup>373</sup> Satyros' works include details of the author's departure from Athens to the court of Archelaus, as well as details on his death in Macedon. Written with an educational and hagiographic purpose in a manner very far from what we would call a historical biography, the works of Satyros had an undue influence on scholarship. With regard to *Bakchai*, Dodds thought that the Macedonian environment was partly responsible for the mystic content of the play and felt that "the renewed contact with nature in the wild country of Macedonia ... had released some spring in the aged poet's mind, re-establishing a contact with hidden sources of power which he had lost in the self-conscious, over-intellectualised environment of late-fifth century Athens".<sup>374</sup> Roux shared the same vision, expressed in tones that reveal well her romantic preconceptions, as she compared Euripides with Chateaubriand discovering American wilderness and defined his feeling as "une sorte de frissonnement et un sentiment vague de la divinité".<sup>375</sup> If there is something definitely not "vague" in *Bakchai* is the sense of divinity.

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<sup>373</sup> Hellenika *Oxyrhynchia* 1176. See Stevens 1956 pp. 87-94. A full list of testimonia in Kovacs' *Euripidea* 1994.

<sup>374</sup> Dodds 1960, p. xivii.

<sup>375</sup> Roux 1970 Vol I pp. 8-9.

Among the most recent scholars' works, those by Revermann,<sup>376</sup> Mills,<sup>377</sup> Hanink<sup>378</sup> and Stewart<sup>379</sup> all share the traditional vision of Euripides' stay in Macedon from about 408 to his death in 407/6 and explore its reasons and consequences for the diffusion of the popularity of Euripides in Macedon and in the Macedonian empire. A radically different view has been pioneered by Fairweather, an early doubter of the factual reality in the ancient biographies of poets,<sup>380</sup> followed by Lefkowitz who radically demystified the historical value of Greek poets' biographies<sup>381</sup> and of Satyros' *Vita*.<sup>382</sup> In 2003, Scullion adopted the same stance and founded his thesis mainly on the absence of satire of Euripides in Macedon in *Frogs*.<sup>383</sup>

Textual analysis of *Bakchai* used by some scholars as evidence for Euripides' stay in Macedon in addition to Satyros' works is founded on less-than-strong evidence. In *Bakchai* 409-411, the chorus invokes Dionysos to lead the maenads to lovely Pieria, seat of the Muses, the solemn slopes of Olympus (καλλιστενομένα Πιερία μούσειος ἔδρα, σεμνὰ κλιτὺς Ὀλύμπου). The second passage (568-575), equally sung by the chorus as it invokes Dionysos to put Pentheus to justice, connects Dionysos with the Pieria region in more evocative terms. The chorus wonders where Dionysos is leading his thiasoi, and wonders whether it is in the land of the much-wooded coverts of Olympus (ἐν ταῖς πολυδένδρεσσιν Ὀλύμπου θαλάμαις), where once Orpheus played

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<sup>376</sup> Revermann 1999-2000 pp. 451-467.

<sup>377</sup> Mills 2006, p. 8.

<sup>378</sup> Hanink 2008 pp. 115-135.

<sup>379</sup> Stewart 2019 pp. 1-23, Lewis S. (ed.) *Tyranny: New Contexts* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de Franche Comté).

<sup>380</sup> Fairweather 1974 pp. 231-275.

<sup>381</sup> Lefkowitz 1978 pp. 459-469

<sup>382</sup> Lefkowitz 1979 pp. 187-210.

<sup>383</sup> Scullion 2003 pp. 389-400.

the lyre to trees and wild animals. In a *makarismos* to the region the chorus then calls the region a region of fine horses, enriched by the waters of rivers. Both passages are not strong enough evidence to support Euripides' having written *Bakchai* while in Macedon, as they may have been a way to prepare the play for its production at the newly built theatre at Dion,<sup>384</sup> Archelaus' new capital of Macedon, following his composition of *Archelaus*, a play establishing the aetiology of the Macedonian king. Furthermore, the connection between the region and Mount Olympos, the massive mountain towering above Dion, seat of the gods, and the figure of Orpheus, raises other powerful associations, as Orpheus was the legendary founder of mystery cults, and as such characterised for instance in *Frogs* (1032).<sup>385</sup> It is even possible that it was these passages that gave someone the idea that Euripides wrote the play in northern Greece.

I would argue that whether or not Euripides wrote *Bakchai* and ended his life in Macedon is perhaps irrelevant to the interpretation of *Bakchai*. An old man deeply engaged all his life in his polis would not forget it on a trip abroad. A parallel reading of *Bakchai* and *Frogs* reveals the Athenian context and focus of both plays and is evidence of the continuity of Euripides' concern with religion, ethics and political thought throughout his career.<sup>386</sup> Further to my analysis of the political content of *Hiketides* (produced in around 423) and its relevance to a political reading of the anti-tyrannical ideology in *Bakchai* (see 5.4), as well as on

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<sup>384</sup> Alexander the great used that same theatre, cf. Diodorus 17.16.

<sup>385</sup> "Ὀρφεὺς μὲν γὰρ τελετὰς θ' ἡμῖν κατέδειξε". Cf also Euripides (?) *Rhesus* 943: "μυστηρίων τῶν ἀπορρήτων φανὰς/ἔδειξεν Ὀρφεύς", Pausanias 2.30.2 etc.

<sup>386</sup> It is of course entirely possible that Euripides was kept informed of events in Athens. The circle of prime Athenian artistic personalities who were at Archelaus' court with Euripides comprised the tragedian Agathon, his lover Pausanias, the painter Zeuxis, the poet Timotheus and the epic poet Choerilus of Samos (Stewart 2019, p. 1, with ancient sources). Sea communications between Athens and Macedon would have been regular, at least until Aigospotamoi.



the plea for political peace and equality in *Phoenissai* (produced around 410) that anticipates some of the themes of *Bakchai* (see 5.11), some notes on the fragments of *Archelaus*, a tragedy allegedly written by Euripides in Macedon probably at the same time as *Bakchai*, can serve to dispel the idea of a “Macedonian element” in *Bakchai*.

The play is evidence of Euripides’ interest in ethics and politics at the end of his life. *Archelaus* is an open attempt to strengthen the ancient claim of Macedonians to be Greek<sup>387</sup> and establishes also the genealogy of the Macedonian royal family to be descendant of Heracles. Not surprisingly, most of the extant fragments attributed to the play emphasise the strength of the founding members of the family through toil as opposed to wealth (232, 236, 237/240, 233 etc.). Yet, Euripides’ continuing concern with tyranny and justice is evident, despite his work being dedicated to a ruler known for his tyrannical regime.<sup>388</sup> As he had done in *Phoenissai* (506) he calls tyranny as rated second only to the gods, not possessing immortality, but all other divine prerogatives (fr. 250), possibly in the context of a status desired by all, a traditional theme of pre-classical poetry.<sup>389</sup> The theme of justice, central to *Bakchai*, is also present here: in fragment 252 of *Archelaus* Euripides refers to justice as producer of great gains to mankind, and to religion (*eusebeia*) as the only wealth, while in fr. 255 he defines justice as unseen but present, knowing whom to punish and destroying the wicked.<sup>390</sup> If an inspirational link of *Bakchai* is to be found in

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<sup>387</sup> An ancient claim, cf. Herodotus 5.22.

<sup>388</sup> Cf. Plato *Gorgias* 525c-e who puts Archelaus among those tyrants, kings and potentates who have committed the gravest and most impious offences (μέγιστα καὶ ἀνοσιώτατα ἁμαρτήματα ἁμαρτάνουσι).

<sup>389</sup> Cf. Archilochos fr. 19 and 24, Solon fr. 32.

<sup>390</sup> “ἐκ τῶν δικαίων γὰρ νόμοι ταῦξήματα/μεγάλα φέρουσι, πάντα δ’ ἀνθρώποις <καλά>./τάδ’ ἐστὶ χρήματ’, ἣν τις εὐσεβῇ θεόν”.

Macedon, one should perhaps look at king Archelaus as one of the models of the figure of Pentheus as the mad and violent tyrant (see 5.5).

## 5.1 Scholarship Review

Scholars have tended to either miss or misapprehend the similarities between the choral odes in the plays, largely ignored the extra-textual context of them, and treated them as unconnected works in the separate fields of Old Comedy and Tragedy. This has led them to overlook the correlation of their political content and also to misapprehend both *Frogs* and *Bakchai*.

While the two plays are, in Lada-Richards words, “the two most important extant dramatizations of Dionysus in the theatre of the Athenian polis”,<sup>391</sup> and the amount of work done by scholars on each play and on the relationship between the cult of Dionysos and theatre is vast, there has been little research and comparative study on the plays in the historical context in which they were written and produced, as well as on the similarity of their ethical and civic content. The plea in both plays for social and political equality, for an end to civic strife, for a return to traditional values and for the re-establishment of peace and civil coexistence through mystery cults has been largely been ignored by scholars, who have tended to examine the two plays separately and have overlooked the links between the crisis the city was in and the urgent political content of the plays and the appeal of mystery cults in a city in which mystic initiates were a substantial section. Only by considering both plays in their historical, cultic, religious and political context can we hope to discard some of

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<sup>391</sup> Lada-Richards 1999 p. 121.

our “modern conceptual hierarchies” and try to “reconstruct the perceptual filters of the fifth-century Athenian audience”.<sup>392</sup>

Despite the central role of mystic choruses of frogs and Eleusinian initiates in the first chapter of *Frogs* and of Asian and Theban maenads in the whole of *Bakchai*, the similarity of their ritual expressions and of the ethical and political content of their odes, scholarship on the mystic/political implications of the chorus has tended to focus separately on each play, as noted by Kowalzig.<sup>393</sup> Some scholars have in the past attributed the correspondence of the plays’ choral odes to Aristophanes’ knowledge of Euripides’ *Bakchai*, either having seen the play, or having read the text.<sup>394</sup> *Frogs*, in this interpretation, would largely consist in a mockery or criticism of *Bakchai*’s treatment of Dionysos’ figure and cult. No evidence exists for this notion.<sup>395</sup> Among the few scholars who have taken note of the striking similarities between the plays, Segal (1961) attributes them to *Frogs* being a reassessment of the Dionysiac cult as described in *Bakchai*, and entirely misses the mystic, Eleusinian content and impact of *Bakchai* in its historical context out of the theatre.<sup>396</sup> In his introduction to *Frogs*,

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<sup>392</sup> Sourvinou-Inwood 2003 p. 2-5.

<sup>393</sup> Kowalzig 2007 p. 225.

<sup>394</sup> Pascal 1911 p. 48; Segal 1961 p. 227; Carrière 1966 pp. 121-2; Cantarella 1974 pp. 292-301.

<sup>395</sup> There is no evidence that Aristophanes was aware of the text of *Bakchai* when he wrote *Frogs*. In the play Aristophanes quotes from a large number of Euripides’ plays or parodies them. The plays include *Hypsipyle*, *Andromeda*, *Oineus*, *Alcmene*, *Melanippe the Wise*, *Alexander*, *Hippolytus*, *Philoctetes*, *Orestes*, *Theseus*, *Antigone*, *Sthenoboa*, *Phrixos*, *Iphigenia in Taurica*, *Meleager*, *Iphigenia in Aulis*, *Electra*, *Hecabe*, *Temenidae*, *Cretans*, *Medea*, *Aiols*, and *Polydos* (Schlesinger 1936, pp. 303-8). He never quotes *Bakchai*.

<sup>396</sup> Segal 1961 pp. 227-228, ignoring the political relevance of the mystery cults, writes: “There is good reason to believe that Aristophanes knew Euripides’ play and may even be alluding to it in several passages. In so far as the *Bakchai* may be regarded as a defence of the divinity of Dionysus and an attempt to return to simpler and more immediate forms of belief, there may be perhaps, paradoxically, some basic similarities with the *Frogs* ... the difference lies precisely in the types of Dionysus presented in the two plays. Against this individualistic, orgiastic god, who manifests himself in

Dover too notes the coincidence of words and phrases of the plays and entertains the possibility that Aristophanes had been aware of *Bakchai's* text and had made allusions destined for drama connoisseurs.<sup>397</sup> In both her studies of *Bakchai*, Foley (1980, 1985) notes the similarities between the language of the early choral odes of the *Bakchai* and that chorus of Eleusinian initiates in *Frogs* but does not pursue the theme further, other than noting the common theme of Dionysos' acceptance by the polis and the similarity between the scene mocking the god's costume in *Frogs* (45-6) and that of Pentheus dressing up as a female maenad (821 ff.).<sup>398</sup>

Attention to the similarities of the two plays brings into evidence their common mystic content: a parallel reading of their religious, ethical and political content clears the ground of some misconceptions of each. Scholars' attention to the relevance of Aristophanes' *Frogs*' political content in its wider historical context for instance has been negligible. Scholars have mostly limited the study of the political side of *Frogs* to the political plea in the parodos and in the parabasis, to the agon between Euripides and Aeschylus and to the public figures Aristophanes attacks, and treated them as elements separate from the mystery cult content of the play. The parodos contains Aristophanes' plea on behalf of those who had been excluded from their political rights as supporters of the 411 oligarchic coup, but scholars have given little attention to the choral plea to extend the religious ritual exclusion from the mystic rituals about to be performed on stage to those fomenting *stasis* in the parodos and to other traitors (354 ff.), a solemn religious exclusion that marks the tension between the

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subjective illusion, Aristophanes sets the Dionysus of comedy ... There is almost a deliberate attempt to free Dionysus from the dangerous elements that appear in the *Bakchai*".

<sup>397</sup> Dover 1993 p. 38.

<sup>398</sup> Foley 1985 p. 229.

community of initiates and the political elite of Athens. Equally, Aristophanes' intense appeal to political equality and to mystic and civil solidarity in the parabasis (675-737) have largely been taken as an aristocratic-leaning plea on behalf of those who had participated to the coup of 411, ignoring its immediate relevance in *stasis*-torn Athens.<sup>399</sup>

In his introduction to *Frogs* Stanford (1958) only dedicates two short paragraphs to the play's historical and political background, noting that "405 (was) no easy time for making Athenians laugh and forget their cares", as they "must have known that ultimate victory was unlikely", that the city was suffering greatly from economic decline, from the lack of food, the debasement of the currency and inflation, the ill-effects of the plague and over-crowding, but does not extend his search into the play as a religious and political reaction to the religious and political crisis the polis found itself in.<sup>400</sup> Stanford gives little attention to the religious aspect of the play and observes that the figure of Dionysos "rather resembles the oil which helps to blend a salad, than any solid substance", amusingly describes the enactment of Eleusinian rituals of the chorus of frogs (211-219) as "delicious ... to please rustic members of the audience with memories of the countryside" and ignores the likely impact on the audience of the evocation of the Dionysiac festival ritual that announces the choral odes.<sup>401</sup>

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<sup>399</sup> Stanford 1958 p. 131 n. 686 focuses on Aristophanes' plea on behalf of the oligarchs as "perhaps some of Aristophanes' friends were among those he pleads for". Dover 1993 pp. 73-6 and Sommerstein 1997 pp. 19-22 focus on the political success of the play and of Patrokleides' decree. Wiles 2011 p. 40, rightly calls the revival of the play because of its parabasis alone "a detail that sounds like a scholarly surmise". See also McGlew 2002 pp. 163-170 for a discussion on the passage and the critique of some scholars' interpretations.

<sup>400</sup> Stanford 1958 pp. XIV-XVII. Yet Athenians were still optimistic on their chances to win the war, and the lack of food presumably started after the loss of control over the Black sea passage at Aigospotamoi.

<sup>401</sup> Stanford 1958 pp. XXIX-XXXI

In his seminal work on the same play Segal (1961) mentions “the breakdown of the communal solidarity which the battle of Arginousai and its aftermath exposed”,<sup>402</sup> and the solidarity that only the poetry of Aeschylus can recreate but does not touch on the theme of the urgency of the play’s mystic message in the context of the emergence of *stasis*. While correctly defining the role of the chorus as “holy, because they are expressive of the religious unity of the state”,<sup>403</sup> he concentrates his attention on Aristophanes’ attempt to restore *mousikē* as “an attempt to re-establish the communal values of literature”, as the only possible way to restore Athens’ glory. As a consequence, Segal overlooks the role of the chorus in its solemn plea for political equality while he emphasises the transformation of Dionysos into the judge of the educative function of tragedy and comedy. Believing that the play was a response to Euripides’ *Bakchai*, Segal remarks that in *Frogs* “the asocial, orgiastic Dionysus of *Bakchai* is rejected ... as being hostile to this spirit of communal regeneration”,<sup>404</sup> the very Dionysiac communal regeneration that is in fact not only the focus of *Frogs*, but also of *Bakchai*.

In the chapter dedicated to politics in *Frogs*<sup>405</sup> Dover (1993) seems to identify the political message of the play in the “salvation of Athens (that) lies in seeking an end to the war in less intransigent terms”,<sup>406</sup> basing himself on a hint in line 1532, and focuses on the *epirrhema* of the parabasis (687-99), seen as a plea for the restoration of citizen-rights to those who had participated in the oligarchic

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<sup>402</sup> Segal 1961 p. 213.

<sup>403</sup> Segal 1961 p. 224.

<sup>404</sup> Segal 1961 p. 230.

<sup>405</sup> Dover 1993 pp. 69-76.

<sup>406</sup> Dover 1993 p. 73.

coup of 411. Both Dover and Stanford overlook the strength of Aristophanes' direct appeal to the polis "in the first place ... that all citizens should be made equal" (688), a call for political equality and civic solidarity in a period in Athens' history when both values were under threat. While ignoring the mystery cults' implications in the first part of the play and in its ending, Dover's main focus is on the prize Aristophanes was awarded and its implications. Dover gives significance to the political content of the play only as the advice to the polis Aristophanes gives in the parabasis may have been reflected in Patrokleides' decree the following year and caused the play to be produced again. The importance of Eleusinian rituals as an ethical and political solution to the city's crisis is thus overlooked as is the tension between the community of initiates and the men ruling the ekklesia.

In his introduction to *Frogs* Sommerstein (1997) extensively relates the military and political situation that the polis was in, but largely ignores the impact of the enactment of Eleusinian rituals on stage on the audiences and the interrelation between mystery cults, theatre representations and politics in a delicate moment of *stasis*.<sup>407</sup> While Lada-Richards (1999) makes a deep analysis of the play in its wide religious and social context, she only refers to the political state of the polis in the epilogue, as she mentions that the blessings Aeschylus brings to the city are aimed at "the real-life citizens of the distressed and tormented polis of 405 BC".<sup>408</sup>

The work of Edmonds III on Aristophanes' *Frogs* (2004) focusses on the connection of the theme of the journey to the underworld in Greek religion to

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<sup>407</sup> Sommerstein 1997 pp. 1-9.

<sup>408</sup> Lada-Richards 1999 p. 327.

Dionysus' *katabasis* in the play and links the play to the Orphic gold tablets, to the works of Plato on the myth of the second birth of philosophers.<sup>409</sup> No reference is made to Athens' political situation, nor to the play's ethical and political message connected with the tenets of mystic rituals. But the reconstruction of Dionysos' *katabasis* as the illustration of a proper mystic initiation misses Aristophanes combination of myths, comic relief, seriousness and ribaldry. Dionysos' *katabasis* is likely to be a mixture of different elements: in addition to be a rendition of the phases of mystic initiation, it may reflect also Herakles' Eleusinian initiation,<sup>410</sup> Orpheus travel to Hades to Eurydice,<sup>411</sup> and Odysseus' visit to Hades.<sup>412</sup> As such, Dionysos' *katabasis*, while an important part of the fabric of mystic elements of the play, may not be sufficient to "recreate an image of the city as a unified whole".<sup>413</sup>

Commenting on *Frogs*, Wiles (2011) correctly describes it in the framework of a city living "in an atmosphere of hysteria and in-fighting, panic and defiance ... where food was scarce and energy sapped ... the starving city was on the brink of surrender<sup>414</sup> ... (threatened by) bitter divisions and differing level of despair", where "sharing in collective laughter and fantasising a shared utopia were instrumental in bonding the citizen body",<sup>415</sup> but does not discuss the political relevance of the play's religious content nor the importance of mystic themes in the play's specific political environment.

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<sup>409</sup> Edmonds III 2004, pp. 111-158.

<sup>410</sup> Cf. for instance Apollodorus *Bibliotheca* 2.5.12, Diodorus 4.25.1.

<sup>411</sup> Cf. Virgil *Georgics* 4.454-503, Ovid *Metamorphoses* 10.1-73.

<sup>412</sup> Homer *Odyssey* Book 11.

<sup>413</sup> Edmonds III p. 112.

<sup>414</sup> The supply of corn to Athens probably only ceased after the defeat as the polis became under Lysander's siege (Xenophon *Hellenika* 2.2.11). In 405 the polis was not yet in a mood to surrender (Xenophon *Hellenika* 2.2.15).

<sup>415</sup> Wiles 2011 pp. 33-41.



Griffith's vision (2013) of the message of *Frogs* accurately connects the mystic content of the play with its "mood of reunification and community" of its development and of its final scene,<sup>416</sup> but in his exhaustive work on the political background of the play largely ignores the ethical and political *stasis* that was dividing the polis, a *stasis* that came into the open with the regime of the Thirty. Griffith focusses instead on the victory of the figure of Aeschylus as key to the military effectiveness of the polis and of the renewal of the ancient art of theatrical productions. In his review of Griffith's work, Halliwell is therefore right to point at a contradiction in Griffith's interpretation of the symbolic nature of Aeschylus in the play: "a glaring comic contradiction ... the notion that it is Aeschylus, earlier proclaimed the great poet of warlike spirit, who will bring Athens an escape from war (1531-1532)."<sup>417</sup> A parallel reading of *Frogs* and *Bakchai* helps unravelling this issue. In both plays, what is at stake is not the war with Sparta (see 5.3), but the division within the polis, and the need to reconstruct its solidarity and communal spirit in the spirit of mystery cults (cf. 5.11).

A comparative view of the ethical and political content of the two plays in their historical context also helps in clearing the ground from widespread misapprehensions of *Bakchai*. Starting with Nietzsche, most scholars seem to be disconcerted by what they perceive as the play's ambiguity, its "riddle", as Norwood for instance calls it,<sup>418</sup> the "tragic paradox", as Versnel calls the theme of the play.<sup>419</sup> This sentiment influences their perception of the play, giving rise

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<sup>416</sup> Griffith 2013 p. 200.

<sup>417</sup> Halliwell 2015 pp. 508-510.

<sup>418</sup> Norwood 1908.

<sup>419</sup> Versnel 1998.

to the widespread perception of a duality in the role of the chorus of maenads, peaceful at first and murderous later, of an equally double-natured god, friendly and smiling at first but later unnaturally cruel in his punishment of the tyrant and his household. The horror at the scene of the slaying and dismembering of Pentheus has prompted scholars to see Pentheus in a positive light as defender of the polis of Thebes, ignoring the evidence for the play on his nature as a tyrant who rules by terror (43, 1310). For this reason, scholars have tended to identify Pentheus with the polis of Thebes, as defender of the city's laws and civic peace, while seeing Dionysos as the god of irrationality and anti-polis destructive violence: for the most part scholars have overlooked the socio-political nature of the cult of Dionysos. Dionysos is never cruel: he acts on behalf of divine justice (992, 1011) and punishes a man who had violently rejected his divinity, as any Greek deity would have done.<sup>420</sup>

These analyses fall short of the evidence for the play, particularly when studied in its religious context. In common with other Dionysiac myths, Pentheus' religious initiation/sacrifice is an essential step in the passage of the polis to a collective and more egalitarian socio-political structure through the self-destruction of the male-dominated royal household. The anti-tyrannical stance of the play has thus been largely ignored, but the theme was highly relevant in Athens, as we shall observe in 5.4-5.5.<sup>421</sup>

Most scholars have emphasised the horror of cultic *sparagmós* and *homophagia* in *Bakchai*, as if the sacrifice of Pentheus was unique in Greek culture.<sup>422</sup> Other

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<sup>420</sup> Cf. for instance the punishment Apollo and Artemis brought on the children of Niobe (Homer *Iliad*, 24.602 ff.)

<sup>421</sup> See amongst others Massenzio 1969 pp. 27-113, Seaford 1994 chapters 7 and 8, Seaford 1996 pp. 44-52.

<sup>422</sup> *Homophagia*, while not actually performed by the maenads, is hinted at in *Bakchai* 1183 and 1242-7 as the meal at which Pentheus will be served as a serving of young bull (1185-7). If Seneca's *Thyestes*' scene of *sparagmós* and

scenes of similar horror have not attracted the same scholarly attention: in Greek mythology human sacrifices are often performed in ritual,<sup>423</sup> in extant Greek tragedy divine punishment occurs with some frequency, for instance in Aeschylus' *Persians* and *Agamemnon*, in Sophokles' *Ajax*, *Trachiniae*, *Oedipus Tyrannos*, in Euripides' *Hippolytus*, and scenes of inter-family murders and perverted human sacrifices also occur, for instance in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*.<sup>424</sup>

Other Dionysiac myths portray the figure of the king or members of the royal family being punished for their rejection of his divinity and/or his gift of wine but have never been object of scholars' horror. Lykourgos in Homer's *Iliad* (6.129 ff.) for instance, angered the gods because of his having disbanded Dionysos' *thiasos* and forced the god to dive in the sea. The gods then made him blind, and he did not live long afterwards. In Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (4.1-40, 390-415) the princesses of Orchomenos who did not follow the Dionysiac rituals were turned into bats. Other myths, such as those of Ikarios and Ankaaios, contain elements of violence and killings that Massenzio for instance convincingly examines from the point of view of the conflict caused by Dionysos' gift of wine as *xenos* in an economy structured around animal farming and family rule (see 5.2).<sup>425</sup>

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*homophagia* (682-789) can be considered modelled upon Sophokles' or Euripides' tragedies on the same subject, gory details may have been considerably cruder than those in Euripides' *Bakchai*.

<sup>423</sup> Burkert 1972 p. 20.

<sup>424</sup> Henrichs 2000 p. 173: "(Greek tragedy) reeks of blood and is strewn with corpses. In play after play, prominent men, women, and children face hard choices and die violent deaths. Like the myths from which they derive, the plots of tragedy explore ritual murder, infanticide, kin killings, suicide, and cannibalism, as well as more ordinary forms of homicide."

<sup>425</sup> Massenzio 1969 pp. 27-113; see also Seaford 1994 pp. 291-2.

The paramount attention given by scholars to the play's contrasts derives from a notion of the inhuman cruelty and irrationality of the Dionysiac figure and cult that was originally expressed by Nietzsche in his *Birth of Tragedy* (1872).<sup>426</sup> As convincingly argued by Henrichs among others, the influence of Nietzsche and of Rohde's *Psyche* (1898) on scholarship on *Bakchai* and on the Dionysiac cult lasts to this day.<sup>427</sup> These works established some of the tenets that have been the basis of the interpretation of the play adopted by scholars as diverse as Dodds,<sup>428</sup> Winnington-Ingram,<sup>429</sup> Girard,<sup>430</sup> Roux,<sup>431</sup> Oranje,<sup>432</sup> Vernant<sup>433</sup> and Versnel.<sup>434</sup> In his work on the birth of Greek tragedy, work that he "never intended to be a work of scholarship",<sup>435</sup> Nietzsche, ignoring entirely the play's historical and cultic background, introduces the concept of Dionysos' double nature, as "cruel barbarised daemon and a mild, gentle hearted ruler",<sup>436</sup> a theory that has heavily influenced literary criticism of the play.<sup>437</sup> He also expressed concepts such as Euripides' alleged early atheism and his opposition

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<sup>426</sup> A work Nietzsche later (1886) however partially recanted: "I call it something poorly written, ponderous, embarrassing, with fantastic and confused imagery, sentimental, here and there so saccharine it is effeminate, uneven in tempo, without any impulse for logical clarity, extremely self-confident and thus dispensing with evidence, even distrustful of the *relevance* of evidence, like a book for the initiated, like "Music" for those baptized into music, those who are bound together from the start in secret and esoteric aesthetic experiences as a secret sign recognized among blood relations *in artibus*, an arrogant and rhapsodic book." Nietzsche 1999, pp. 5-6.

<sup>427</sup> Henrichs 1984 pp. 205-240, in particular pp. 223-228; Seaford 1995 p. 6.; Seaford 1996 pp. 30-5.

<sup>428</sup> Dodds 1960 first edition 1944.

<sup>429</sup> Winnington-Ingram 1948.

<sup>430</sup> Girard 1988 originally published 1972.

<sup>431</sup> Roux 1972.

<sup>432</sup> Oranje 1984.

<sup>433</sup> Vernant 1985.

<sup>434</sup> Versnel 1998.

<sup>435</sup> Henrichs 1984 p. 224.

<sup>436</sup> Nietzsche 1999 p. 52.

<sup>437</sup> It is curious that Nietzsche's work managed to survive the deservedly scathing criticism of his colleague von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (1872).

to Dionysiac cults that he would have recanted late in life,<sup>438</sup> the notion that tragic performances bringing their audiences to “pitches of Dionysiac frenzy” through a “horrible ‘witches’ brew’ of sensuality and cruelty”<sup>439</sup>, enabling spectators to merge into nature’s “mysterious primordial unity (*Das Ur-Eine*)”,<sup>440</sup> concepts perhaps vital in the creation of Nietzsche’s philosophical system, but extraneous to a modern reading of *Bakchai*.

Rohde, a friend of Nietzsche, starts his study of Dionysiac religion in Greece with the sentence “The Greeks received from the Thracians and assimilated for their own purposes the worship of Dionysos”,<sup>441</sup> a theory that influenced scholars and surprisingly survived the discovery in the 1950’s of Linear-B tablets containing the name of Dionysos and several later finds of similar tablets in Krete and Pylos.<sup>442</sup> “*Bakchai* is a play about an historical event - the introduction into Hellas of a new religion”: this vision opens Dodds’ influential interpretation of *Bakchai* (1944).<sup>443</sup> While maintaining that the Dionysiac cult was not native to Greece, in the second edition of his book (1960) Dodds acknowledges the decipherment made by Ventris and Chadwick of the Pylos tablet, but merely notes that the introduction of the cult into Greece may refer to “a very remote period”.<sup>444</sup> Dodds mainly focuses on the play’s religious content and context, and only mentions “Athens crazed by twenty years of

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<sup>438</sup> A theory that Dodds 1960 p. xli-xlii calls “palinode” and correctly disproves.

<sup>439</sup> Nietzsche 1999 p. 20.

<sup>440</sup> Nietzsche 1999 p. 18.

<sup>441</sup> Rohde 1925 (1989) p. 282.

<sup>442</sup> Henrichs’ entry on Dionysos in OCD’s third edition 1996 contains details. See also a full exploration in Bernabé 2013 p. 23-37.

<sup>443</sup> Dodds 1960 p. xi.

<sup>444</sup> Dodds 1960 p. xxi

increasingly disastrous war",<sup>445</sup> "social stresses generated by the Peloponnesian War"<sup>446</sup> that caused the emergence of "the new religions of the orgiastic type ... eastern and northern mystery gods, Cybele and Bendis, Attis, Adonis, and Sabazius ..." a new threat to the polis to which the play may allude.<sup>447</sup> While devoting great attention to the anthropological background of mystery cults, Dodds overlooks entirely the civic and political dimension those cults had in the polis of Athens at the end of the fifth century.

Key to his interpretation is the Nietzschean figure of Dionysos, "the embodiment of tragic contradictions – joy and horror, insight and madness, innocent gaiety and dark cruelty",<sup>448</sup> Dodds insists on the contrast between the god and Pentheus "a conservative Greek aristocrat who despises the new religion ... hates it for its obliteration of sex and class distinctions and fears it as a threat to social order and public morals",<sup>449</sup> and largely ignores the positive features of the new cult that are expressed in *Bakchai*, as well as the political relevance of representing on stage the killing of a tyrant and evoking the role of the Dionysiac cult in reconstructing the polis in that particular moment in Athens' life.

Still in the wake of Nietzsche and perhaps also influenced by the growth of Nazism and the events of WWII, Winnington-Ingram (1948) writes that the subject of *Bakchai* is "the Dionysiac group and its disastrous potentialities ... the drugged peace which alternates with furious violence ... the exclusive and

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<sup>445</sup> Dodds 1960 p. xxxix.

<sup>446</sup> Dodds 1960 p. xxiii.

<sup>447</sup> Dodds 1960 p. xxiii.

<sup>448</sup> Dodds 1960 (1944), p. xlv.

<sup>449</sup> Dodds 1960 p. xxvii.

undiscriminating cult of emotions".<sup>450</sup> Winnington-Ingram focuses exclusively on Euripides' attitude towards religion: "he is exposing the inadequate conception of divinity" describing "a religion compounded of beauty and terror ... a religion of unreason".<sup>451</sup> While focusing on Euripides' poetic treatment of the irrational and violent nature of the cult of Dionysos, Winnington-Ingram, as Dodds had done, only mentions as current political issues that the tragedy may address the polis' concerns on "the cult of Sabazius or Bendis or any other political problem which involved the force of emotions".<sup>452</sup>

This peculiar interpretation of the cult of Dionysos as a threat to the cohesiveness of the polis is shared by Segal (1961) who in a passage dedicated to the similarities between *Frogs* and *Bakchai* defines "the orgiastic Dionysus, (as) essentially asocial, a dangerous god, quick to punish offenses upon his divinity. Defiance of his worship produces individual convulsions that shake the state and negate accepted social values".<sup>453</sup> In a later, longer work dedicated to *Bakchai* Segal acknowledges his debt to Henrichs and Nietzsche, and calls Dionysos the "elusive god". Segal focuses on the god's duality, where "destruction and creativity coexist ... a culture hero and a threat to civilisation".<sup>454</sup> While still ignoring both the extra-textual context of the play and the moral and political relevance of the play's choral odes, Segal limits his remarks noting that "Euripidean tragedy ... holds a tension between the centrifugal forces it represents – entropy, irrational and inexplicable suffering,

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<sup>450</sup> Winnington-Ingram 1948 p. 178-9.

<sup>451</sup> Winnington-Ingram 1948 p. 4-5.

<sup>452</sup> Winnington-Ingram 1948 p. 171.

<sup>453</sup> Segal 1961 pp. 227-228.

<sup>454</sup> Segal 1982 p. 17.

chaos, and the centripetal, cohesive forces that lie ... in the creative, ordering unifying energies of the work itself and ... in the mind behind the work".<sup>455</sup>

Musurillo (1966) too overlooks the play's ethical and political content and emphasises the cult's unrestrained violence. Musurillo defines *Bakchai* as a play of "tantalizing ambiguity", as "the promised peace emerges only from orgy and violence"<sup>456</sup>. In his work on violence and the birth of religion as a mean to tame innate human violence Girard (1972) dedicates a few pages to *Bakchai* in a vision that to some extent resemble Dodds': he extends to the whole society the risks inherent in "the bacchants revel ... a bloodthirsty nightmare ... that spells the disintegration of social institutions and the collapse of the cultural order ... symbolized by the destruction of the royal palace".<sup>457</sup> But, unlike Dodds, Girard correctly identifies Pentheus' slaughter as a ritual sacrifice, whose "violent death provided the necessary outlet for the mass anguish, and restored peace ... the rite is directed toward order and tranquillity, not violence" an act that causes "peace and harmony to return to Thebes"<sup>458</sup>, but ignores the play's relevance to its fifth-century Athenian audience. Unlike most commentators Roux (1972) puts the tragedy in its cultural context and attributes the play's content to an answer to the political and military disasters associated with the sophistic movement during the late years of the Peloponnesian war, movement represented in the play by Pentheus.<sup>459</sup> Roux focuses her attention on the figure of Pentheus, "spiritually blind",<sup>460</sup> victim of his sophistic rationalism opposed to

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<sup>455</sup> Segal 1982 p. 340-1.

<sup>456</sup> Musurillo 1966 pp. 300 and 309.

<sup>457</sup> Girard 1988 (1972) p. 235.

<sup>458</sup> Girard 1988 (1972) pp. 139-41.

<sup>459</sup> Roux 1972 I, p. 54.

<sup>460</sup> Roux 1972 I p. 47.



the cult of a god who brings humanity to a higher level of happiness than material prosperity.<sup>461</sup>

To the best of my knowledge Foley was the first scholar not to be drawn into the “paradox” theme in her 1975 Harvard doctoral dissertation.<sup>462</sup> Later, in her complex analysis of the play Foley (1985) dedicates attention to *Bakchai* as “a kind of initiation into the mysteries of the divine and the mysteries of the self”,<sup>463</sup> to the metatheatrical implications of the play, to the significance of the play as religious ritual, but limits her reading of the play’s socio-political context to a brief definition of the issues confronting *Bakchai*’s Thebes and *Frogs*’ Athens as “a contradiction between the aim for political equality among citizens and the exclusion of members of the society from full participation”, that severely limits the political plea of the plays.<sup>464</sup> Foley too overlooks the relevance of the play to the political circumstances the city was in, and only mentions very briefly that *Bakchai*’s text “reflects the precariousness of social and political life in late fifth-century Athens”.<sup>465</sup>

In 1985 Vernant published his seminal analysis of the play that starts with a radical critique of scholarship, as founded on conceptual tools whose base were the critics’ modern religious spirit and cultural bias, but falls under the influence of the Nietzschean concept of the god’s duality and paradoxes: “comme le vin, Dionysos est double: terrible à l’extrême, infiniment doux”.<sup>466</sup> Despite his break with traditional scholarship and an innovative interpretation

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<sup>461</sup> Roux 1972 I pp. 56-62.

<sup>462</sup> Foley 1980 pp. 107-133.

<sup>463</sup> Foley 1985 p. 244.

<sup>464</sup> Foley 1985 p. 255.

<sup>465</sup> Foley 1985 p. 206.

<sup>466</sup> Vernant 1985 p. 49.

of the play's complex structure, Vernant shows all the limitations of structuralism, as he confines his analysis exclusively to the text and ignores both the mystic content of *Bakchai* and the impact that the play would have had on its audience in the complex political aftermath of the coup of 411.

Versnel (1998) entitles his study of *Bakchai* "Tragic Paradox", refers to "ambiguities" in *Bakchai* in the contrasting concepts of *asebeia* of the characters of Pentheus and Dionysos, overlooks the implications of the chorus' ethical and civic pleas and disregard the relevance of the anti-tyrannical stance of the play.<sup>467</sup> While affirming that "the ancient audience and the modern reader share the same basic qualities for understanding the meaning of the work", Versnel falls into the obvious pitfall of adopting a modern conceptual framework to comprehend such an entirely different reality, to which he somewhat contradictorily adds his "belief in a historical approach to a work of art"<sup>468</sup>. Versnel adopts Dodds' vision and devotes his essay on the "Tragic Paradox of *Bakchai*" to show Euripides' aim as "deliberately presenting Dionysiac religion as one of the new sects that invaded Greece and especially Athens in his time ... converting the eternal Dionysiac ambiguity into a conflict in the actual reality of his time ... (in order) to question the nature of religious convictions in general ... Contemporary authorities condemned the new zealots."<sup>469</sup> Despite his claim to a historical approach Versnel ignores entirely the political and the religious content of the play in its historical and ideological context.

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<sup>467</sup> Versnel 1998 pp. 96-212.

<sup>468</sup> Versnel 1990 pp. 100-1.

<sup>469</sup> Versnel 1968 pp. 99-100.

Declaring his indebtedness to Dodds and Roux,<sup>470</sup> and criticising Versnel's view of *Bakchai* "tragic paradox" and his vision of Pentheus as defender the polis,<sup>471</sup> Seaford makes some important contributions to a radical change in the way *Bakchai* is to be interpreted within the framework of mystery cults and their cultural and political relevance in fifth-century Athens. He correctly identifies the figure of Dionysos with that "communality that is vital to the cohesion of the polis",<sup>472</sup> defines the ritual sacrifice of Thebes' tyrant and Dionysos' destruction of households as necessary steps for the establishment of polis equality,<sup>473</sup> convincingly argues that the play ends with the god's establishment of his cult at Thebes as basis for a reunited polis,<sup>474</sup> and, through his re-establishment of the transmitted text of the choral refrain in 877-881 and 897-901 and a new translation, affirms the continuity of the civic, ethical and religious role of the chorus (see 4.5).<sup>475</sup> Perhaps Seaford's most important contribution is his innovative focus on the play's mystery cult content, upon which he bases his convincing critique of that ultimately Nietzschean concept of tragedy's ambiguity, transgression and irresolvable conflict that is at the base of much of ancient and modern scholarship.<sup>476</sup> Yet Seaford too makes only a passing remark about "the disintegration of the polis ... a constant possibility (that) threatens all its citizens with death or slavery",<sup>477</sup> and fails to connect the political conditions of the polis to the relevance of the play's ethical and political implications of the play's mystic content.

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<sup>470</sup> Seaford 1996 p. VII.

<sup>471</sup> Seaford 1996 p. 46-47.

<sup>472</sup> Seaford 1996 p. 49.

<sup>473</sup> Seaford 1994 pp. 257-9; 1996, p. 49.

<sup>474</sup> Seaford 1996 n. 1329-30, pp. 252-3.

<sup>475</sup> Seaford 1994 pp. 402-5; Seaford 1996 p. 49 and n. 877-81.

<sup>476</sup> Seaford 1994 pp. 363-7.

<sup>477</sup> Seaford 1996 p. 51.

Among the more recent contributions to the study of *Bakchai* the work of Mills is sceptical of Seaford's interpretation, devotes just two paragraphs to the political dimension of the play,<sup>478</sup> and follows Dodds' line on the interpretation of the third stasimon.<sup>479</sup> Her reading of the figure of Pentheus is nuanced: while accepting Pentheus traits as tyrant, and therefore likely to be judged negatively by an Athenian audience, she sympathises with his figure as innocent victim of Dionysos' violence, missing entirely the religious and political dimension of the scene of Pentheus' ritual sacrifice.<sup>480</sup> In his introduction to his work on *Bakchai*, Stuttard devotes a chapter to the play's socio/political context. Tempted by the association of the play with a conversion from an agnostic religious position to writing the play "as a warning to non-believers", Stuttard misses entirely the mystic, civic and political structure of the play and reads the political problems Athens was facing in 405 exclusively from the point of view of the war with Sparta.<sup>481</sup>

## 5.2 Dionysos and Demeter, Mystery Deities

From both a political and a religious point of view Dionysos and Demeter play an important role in both *Bakchai* and *Frogs*, a role that needs to be put into its fifth-century Athenian context. The coupling of the two deities as well as the similarity of the ritual aspects of the two plays shed light on the close relationship between the two cults and their mystic and political implications.

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<sup>478</sup> Mills 2006 pp. 96-97

<sup>479</sup> Mills 2006 p. 45.

<sup>480</sup> Mills 2006 pp. 58-64.

<sup>481</sup> Stuttard 2016 pp. 4-7.

In Hesiodic mythology the two deities were separate. Dionysos is not mentioned in *Theogony*, while he is referred to briefly in both Hesiod's *Shield of Herakles* (398 ff.) and in *Works and Days* (609 ff.) but purely as deity of wine. Demeter on the other hand is mentioned frequently in Hesiod's works, for instance in *Theogony* 454 as daughter of Kronos and Rhea and in *Theogony* 912 as bed-companion of Zeus and mother of Persephone but is never mentioned in conjunction with Dionysos.

In what may be called the Orphic tradition on the other hand, the connection between the worship of Dionysos and that of Demeter/Persephone was close. As Iles Johnston convincingly argues, at the end of the sixth century the Greeks started recomposing and elaborating the theological world of Homer and Hesiod into new myths and cults, using some of the existing deities such as Demeter and Dionysos to create their mystic theological system. This development had the effect for instance of increasing the similarities between the two deities, particularly in making Dionysos into a chthonian god of eschatological initiation to parallel Demeter's cult at Eleusis.<sup>482</sup> The figure of Demeter started being assimilated to other ancient deities and assumed new roles. Demeter, writes the author of the Derveni Papyrus quoting an earlier Orphic theogony, was the same deity as Rhea, Ge, Meter, Hestia, Deio.<sup>483</sup> In the Orphic tradition Demeter was thus believed to have been Zeus' spouse,<sup>484</sup> and

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<sup>482</sup> Graf and Johnson 2007 pp. 66-93.

<sup>483</sup> Derveni Papyrus Column XXII 11-12: 'ἔστι δὲ καὶ ἐν τοῖς Ὑμνοῖς εἰσ[η]μένον· "Δημήτηρ [Ρ]έα Γῆ Μήτηρ Ἑστία Δηώϊ".

<sup>484</sup> Column XXVI. See also West 1983 pp. 93-4, and Betegh 2004 pp. 163-4.

to have thus procreated Persephone, who was also seduced by Zeus, and gave birth to a Dionysos/Zagreus.<sup>485</sup>

Similarly Dionysos took a chthonic role, as Herakleitos attests, for whom Dionysos and Hades were one and the same.<sup>486</sup> Dionysos, son of Demeter and Zeus, recounts Diodoros as he comments on the tales of some ancient writers of myth, was torn to pieces by the Titans and his limbs were boiled, but his body was put together again by Demeter and the god was born again; Diodoros also attests that those ancient mythographers called Demeter “Mother of Earth”. The tradition of the association between Rhea and Dionysos may have been ancient, as ancient poetry composed in the late seventh or sixth century and attributed to Eumelos,<sup>487</sup> attests that Dionysos had received purification from Rhea at Mount Kybela in Phrygia, had been taught the initiation rites and acquired all the equipment from the goddess and roamed over the world dancing and celebrating the rites.<sup>488</sup> Some other evidence for the pairing of the two gods as chthonian, eschatological deities is for instance in the Bakchic gold tablets. In a tablet from Pherae, the initiate asks to be sent to the *thiasoi* of the *mystai* as he possesses the rituals of Bakchos and those of Demeter Chthonia and of the Mountain Mother<sup>489</sup> and in a tablet from Amphipolis the female initiate defines herself as pure and sacred to Dionysos Bakchios.<sup>490</sup>

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<sup>485</sup> A captivating recount of Zeus’ passion for Persephone is also in Nonnos’ *Dionysiaca* 563-ff.

<sup>486</sup> Fragment 15 quoted in Clement *Protrepticus* 34.

<sup>487</sup> West 2002 pp. 109-133.

<sup>488</sup> Fragment 27, West 2003 p. 245-6: “διδαχθεὶς τὰς τελετὰς καὶ λαβὼν πᾶσαν παρὰ τῆς θεοῦ τὴν διασκευὴν”.

<sup>489</sup> Tablet 28, in Graf and Iles Johnston 2007 pp. 38-39. It should be noted that the word “Bakchos” was reconstructed as a conjecture.

<sup>490</sup> Tablet 30, in Graf and Iles Johnston 2007 pp. 40-41.

The two gift-giving deities were the object of great devotion in Athens and Eleusis. The presence of Dionysos is evoked in the Homeric Hymn to Demeter (386) through an allusion to his companions, the maenads. In the description of Demeter running towards Hermes and Persephone down a thick wooded mountain her behaviour is likened to that of a maenad. While short, this is an important allusion in a work that expressed the aition of the Athenian cult of Demeter at Eleusis.

In fifth-century rituals the two gods took similar characteristics. In tragedy and poetry, the pairing of the deities was common. The chorus in Sophokles' *Antigone* invokes Dionysos as "lord of the hollows of Demeter of Eleusis", implying Dionysos' role in the rituals.<sup>491</sup> In the third stasimon of Euripides' *Ion*, the chorus sings of Dionysos observing the torch procession and the dances of the starry sky, the moon and the fifty daughters of Nereos beside the spring of the lovely dances (παρὰ καλλιχόροισι παγαῖς) celebrating Deemeter and Persephone (1074-1089).

Pindar for example calls Dionysos "companion", πάρεδρος of Demeter.<sup>492</sup> In Euripides' *Helen* the chorus recounts the myth of Demeter (1301-1368) whose fury and sorrow at the loss of Kore is only relieved by Aphrodite playing Dionysiac musical instruments, that prompts the goddess to join the Dionysiac music by taking up Dionysos' musical instrument, "the deep sounding pipe, and delighting in its loud cry". Kallimachos equally notes the common ritual framework of the two deities: "whatever vexes Demeter, vexes also

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<sup>491</sup> Sophokles *Antigone* 1115-1121.

<sup>492</sup> Pindar *Isthmian Odes* 7. 1-5.

Dionysos”.<sup>493</sup> Strabo notes that the Greeks assimilated all orgiastic, Bakchic, choral ceremonies and mystic initiations to Demeter above all and that they called “Iakchos” not only Dionysos but also the leader of the mysteries, Demeter’s daimon, noting that certain aspects of the rituals were common to both cults.<sup>494</sup>

Iconographical evidence points to “the coexistence of the great Attic cults of Dionysos and the Two Goddesses on the hill of Eleusis”,<sup>495</sup> and there exist multiple references to a sanctuary of Dionysos in the town of Eleusis that belonged to the Eleusis demos, an important sanctuary where theatrical performances were held, and public decrees set up.<sup>496</sup> Archaeological evidence points to the presence of Iakchos/Dionysos at the mystery ritual of Eleusis since at least the sixth century BC, as Versnel points out,<sup>497</sup> basing himself on a black-figured amphora of the mid-late sixth century attributed to Priam painter depicting Dionysos in a two-wheeled chariot of Triptolemos.<sup>498</sup> Further hard evidence for an early dual cult of Dionysos and Demeter outside Attika and its existence in the first half of the fifth century was found for instance in the ruins of the sanctuary of Persephone at Locroi Epizephyrioi on the Ionian coast of Calabria. In this sanctuary a number of votive *pinakes*, clay relief plaques, have been found. On one of the *pinakes* found, Persephone is seated holding a cockerel in her right hand and sheaves of corn in the other, while Dionysos is

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<sup>493</sup> Kallimachos *Hymn to Demeter* 69-70.

<sup>494</sup> Strabo 10.3.10: “οἱ μὲν οὖν Ἕλληνες οἱ πλεῖστοι ... Ἰακχόν τε καὶ τὸν Διόνυσον καλοῦσι καὶ τὸν ἀρχηγέτην τῶν μυστηρίων, τῆς Δήμητρος δαίμονα: δένδροφοροῖαι τε καὶ χορεῖαι καὶ τελεταὶ κοιναὶ τῶν θεῶν εἰσι τούτων”.

<sup>495</sup> Clinton 1992, p. 125.

<sup>496</sup> Clinton 1992, p. 125.

<sup>497</sup> “The recent reassessment of both the archaeological and literary evidence has established firm Dionysiac connection with Eleusis already in the sixth century BC”, Versnel 1990 p. 153 with sources; also Seaford 1994 pp. 263, 381-2.

<sup>498</sup> ABV 331/13. Currently at Musée Livenel in Compiègne.



standing in front of her, offering Persephone a *kantharos* of wine and carrying a vine branch on his shoulders.<sup>499</sup>

The association between the two gods, if one follows Carpenter's identification of the deities in East side of the Parthenon frieze, was popular in Athens in the age of Perikles.<sup>500</sup> Demeter and Dionysos are depicted sitting in a pose that suggests a particularly intimate association between the two deities.<sup>501</sup>

Dionysos, wearing a himation over the lower part of his body, is seated in the opposite direction of the other gods who are present in this part of the frieze, resting his right arm on Hermes' shoulders. His pose suggests a divine figure who looks where other gods are not, a god who has different characteristics from Olympian deities. The reason for his sitting facing back is Demeter, who leans forward towards Dionysos, her knees between Dionysos', holding a torch in her left hand, her right hand raised to her face, perhaps in grief at the loss of her daughter. The two deities form a small close group in the formal and solemn festivities for Athena, as if sharing a particular form of familiarity.

Clinton finds an illustration of the simultaneous manifestation of the two cults in the Eleusinian mysteries in an equal role, evidence, at least for the fifth century, for the overlapping of the two cults we shall encounter in *Bakchai* and *Frogs*.<sup>502</sup> Clinton concludes cautiously that "evidence seems to reflect, on a local

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<sup>499</sup> Now at Reggio Calabria, National Archaeological Museum. As Sourvinou-Inwood 1978 pp. 108-109 interestingly notes, the presence of pomegranates among the terracotta fruit found at Locri attests a Locrian knowledge of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*. Persephone's cockerel is also related to Hades and the underworld: cf. Cosentino 2016 pp. 189-212.

<sup>500</sup> Carpenter 1997 pp. 90-91.

<sup>501</sup> Mark 1984 p. 291, Carpenter 1997 pp. 90-91.

<sup>502</sup> Clinton 1992, p. 124-5. The evidence is in four vase paintings of the fifth century: a *hydria* from Krete currently at the National Museum in Athens (n. 1443), a *hydria* from Capua currently in the museum of Lyon, a volute crater in Stanford

level, the coexistence of the great Attic cults of Dionysos and of the two goddesses on the hill of Eleusis.” The existence of the cult in the fourth century is supported by evidence such as the report by Pausanias that in the temple of Demeter in Athens there were three statues by Praxiteles, active in 370-330 BC: Demeter, Persephone and Iakchos.<sup>503</sup> Demeter and Dionysos were also the gods celebrated at the women-only Haloa festival in the fourth century, with evidence from *Contra Neaeram* of pseudo-Demosthenes (74-84).<sup>504</sup>

The two deities share some characteristics. Firstly, both are described in myth as coming to Attika from abroad, as *xenoi*, outsiders, strangers. In Athens for instance, the two deities’ mythical advent was celebrated with *xenismoi*, public rituals of welcome and entertainment of the gods, according to Plutarch.<sup>505</sup> In myth, the two deities came to Attika from abroad as *xenoi* at the same time, while Pandion was Athens’ king, according to Apollodoros. Keleos received Demeter and Ikarios received Dionysos.<sup>506</sup> In Greek myth the arrival of a *xenos* god, often Dionysos, and his impact on the community give a solution to the community’s internal strife and imposes on it civilised civic practices by founding his cult.<sup>507</sup> In the *Homeric Hymn* dedicated to her, Demeter comes to Eleusis from Olympos after roaming over dry land and sea (43), and describes herself to the girls at the well as coming to Eleusis from Krete via Thorikos having crossed Attika from its eastern to its western border (123-6), while Dionysos in *Bakchai* comes to Thebes not only from the fabulous world of “the

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University Museum of Arts attributed to the Kleophon painter (70.12, Beazley n. 8110), and a *skyphos* attributed to the painter Makron at the British Museum (Reg. n. 1873,0820.375, Beazley n. 204683).

<sup>503</sup> Pausanias 1.2.4.

<sup>504</sup> That confirms the only classical source, the scholiast to Lucian 279-81. See Parker 1979 p. 256-7.

<sup>505</sup> Plutarch *Life of Demetrius* 12.1.

<sup>506</sup> Apollodoros 3.14.7.

<sup>507</sup> Seaford 1994 pp. 250-7. Seaford 2012 pp. 36-8.

lands of the Lydians and Phrygians, (through) the plains of the Persians, and the Baktrian walls, and the land of the Medes, and ... Arabia, and the whole of Asia", but also from the Greek-speaking world of the cities on the coast of Asia Minor, "full of Greeks and barbarians" (13-9).<sup>508</sup> One of the founding myths of the Dionysiac cult for Athenians was the image of Dionysos "Eleuthereus" that had been brought to Athens by Pegasos "probably a missionary of the cult"<sup>509</sup> from the town of Eleutherai, on the border between Boiotia and Attika on the east side of mount Kithairon, a place as liminal as Eleusis. It was an event that Athenians had celebrated since the earliest days of the festival of the Great Dionysia.<sup>510</sup>

Both *xenoi* gods brought gifts to humankind, gifts whose acceptance cause a deep transformation of social structures, after the initial and often violent disorder created by the arrival of the "new". The gift was for the Greeks an essential component of personal and communal reciprocity, the basis on which rested the Homeric cohesion of the community<sup>511</sup> and, in the case of a divine gift, its grateful acceptance was essential in ensuring humankind's role in the cosmic order. The gift of wine by Dionysos as *xenos* is described in several myths that share some structural characteristics. In his study of Dionysiac *xenia* Massenzio<sup>512</sup> argues persuasively that myths related to Dionysos gift of the art of wine-making creates a new phase of cultural organisation and mark a decisive passage in Greek civilisation, from a civilisation where political power is in the hands of a king, the main economic activity is domestic animal

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<sup>508</sup> On the subject of Dionysos coming to Greek cities as *xenos* see Lada-Richards 1999 pp. 123-5; Petridou 2015 pp. 302-5

<sup>509</sup> Pickard-Cambridge 1968 p. 57.

<sup>510</sup> Seaford 1994 p. 241.

<sup>511</sup> Seaford 1994, pp. 7-10.

<sup>512</sup> Massenzio 1969 p. 56; see also Seaford 1994 pp. 301-5.

farming, handled by individuals or families, to one based on economic activities such as vine and cereal growing and wine making that are only economically viable as a collective and organised activity of a cohesive community. The simultaneous arrival of Demeter and Dionysos was thus meant to mark the aetiology of the polis through its adoption of agricultural techniques in Attika. Not only do the *xenoi* deities transform the economy but they also revolutionise culture and social organisation, down to its first element: family life. Other myths related to the figure of Dionysos connect the figure of the deity with his role in liberating women from patriarchal authority. Several of Dionysos' myths (Oinotropoi, Ikarios, Staphylos, Oinopion etc.) focus on the arrival of the *xenos* that allows females to escape their fathers' authority,<sup>513</sup> transforming a household structure from closed to one that is at least partially open, a myth that Euripides elaborates and expands in *Bakchai*. These myths have an aetiological function: the polis could not survive, particularly in its religious functions, without women who were free, at least partially.

As we noted in 3.2, equally revolutionary are the gifts of Demeter in the *Homeric Hymn*. In the *Hymn*, the goddess defines herself to the girls drawing water at the well as the Giver, Δωσώ, (122), and, as she later proclaims to the women in the palace her divinity, she defines the nature of her gift: "I am Demeter, the greatest source of help and joy to mortals and immortals" (269).<sup>514</sup> Her gift not only grants the fertility of the soil<sup>515</sup> but also marks the foundation of the

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<sup>513</sup> In myth, the dominant kinship relationship of women is with their fathers, which also gives them their collective name (Proitides, Minyades) and comes above their relationship as individuals, sisters, wives and mothers: Massenzio 1969 p. 95.

<sup>514</sup> "μέγιστον/ἀθανάτοις θνητοῖς τ' ὄνεαρ καὶ χάριμα".

<sup>515</sup> The *hierophant* showed an ear of corn to the congregation at the very acme of the ritual, "the mighty, and marvellous, and most perfect secret suitable for one initiated into the highest mystic truths: an ear of grain in silence reaped (ἐν σιωπῇ τεθερισμένον στάχυν)": Hippolytus *Refutatio Omnium Haeresium* 5.3.

Eleusinian rituals that give mortals ὄλβος during and after life, the human equivalent of the divine immortality that Metaneira had caused to be refused for her son and abundance of goods in mortal existence (475-482). In other versions of the myth Demeter's gift was the art of agriculture that she gave to Triptolemos, an art he spread to the whole of mankind.<sup>516</sup> In a similar way to *Bakchai*, the *Homeric Hymn* suggests a radical social change, as the heads of the ruling families of Thebes become the priests of the new cult and the πᾶς δῆμος (271) shows its communal solidarity in building the temple and participating in the goddess mysteries (see 3.2).

The conclusive moments of farming, corn harvesting and wine making, are by their nature collective endeavours and their success depends on social cohesion and the favour of divinity. As purveyor of food to mankind, Demeter thus is also goddess of social peace and communal unity. These implications of the cult of the goddess are made clear for instance in the finale of Kallimachos' *Hymn to Demeter*, a third-century hymn written in honour of the sacred basket-carrying procession established by Ptolemy Philadelphos in imitation of a similar ceremony held in Athens, as a scholiast notes.<sup>517</sup> In the hymn Demeter is closely associated with Eleusis (13-16, 28-30) and defined as preserver of the polis' in harmony and prosperity (ἐν θ' ὁμονοίαι ἐν τ' εὐηπείᾳ), as provider of food in abundance, as preserver of herds, of harvests, and of peace, so that he who ploughs may also reap.<sup>518</sup>

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<sup>516</sup> See Isokrates *Panegyricus* 28: « When Demeter came to our land, ... she gave these two gifts, the greatest in the world — the fruits of the earth, which have enabled us to rise above the life of the beasts, and the holy rite (τὴν τελετήν) which inspires in those who partake of it sweeter hopes regarding both the end of life and all eternity.» See also Apollodoros *Bibliotheca* 1. 32; Kallimachos *Hymn 6 to Demeter* 17 ff.

<sup>517</sup> Mair 1921, p. 31.

<sup>518</sup> Kallimachos *Hymn to Demeter* 134-7.

The two cults intermingle in *Bakchai* and *Frogs*. In *Frogs* the chorus is explicitly composed of Eleusinian initiates, but its parodos starts with an invocation to Iakchos, as it happened during the yearly procession to Eleusis. The god is invited to join the holy choral dance sacred to his blessed mystai (ἀγνάν, ἱερὰν, ὁσίοις μύσταις χορείαν) (335-6). Dancing is then emphasised as the Dionysiac activity of the Eleusinian chorus, and Dionysiac images of torches and nocturnal initiations are used to invoke the god, brilliant star of choral nocturnal initiation rituals, νυκτέρου τελετῆς φωσφόρος ἀστήρ (343). Demeter is only invoked after Iakchos, and Aristophanes identifies the goddess with qualities that connect her cult to the city's prosperity: as goddess of the fertility of the land, and as mistress of the choral initiation rituals, ἀγνῶν ὀργίων ἄνασσα (386-7). Demeter is then openly paired with Iakchos, as the chorus again invites Iakchos to join the chorus to meet the goddess (399-400).

The second reference to Demeter in *Frogs* is made by the soon-to-be demi-god Aeschylus, Eleusis-born, saviour of Athens, who, before entering the agon, solemnly invokes the goddess as nurturer of his mind (ἢ θρέψασα τὴν ἐμὴν φρένα) (886-7), a direct reference to the goddess' role in feeding humankind that also expresses his wish to be worthy of her mysteries. Set at the very beginning of Aeschylus' action in the second part of the play, the exclamation stresses the link between two themes of importance: the polis and the cult of Demeter. So far in the play the cult's civic and mystic values have been expressed by the Eleusinian chorus, now it is Aeschylus who stresses the role of the poet in educating the polis along mystic and civic lines through the medium of theatre, anticipating the opposition between Euripides and himself that will be the political theme of the second part of the play.

In *Bakchai*, although the setting and development of the play is apparently exclusively Dionysiac, the pairing of the two divinities is explicit from the first lines of the parodos, spoken by the chorus of Asian Bacchic maenads. Together with Dionysos the chorus invokes great mother Kybele (79), a deity that may be another appellation of the Mother deity we observed mentioned in the Derveni Papyrus, a deity with more than one name, among which is Demeter. The chorus mentions mother Rhea being handed the drum newly created by the Korybantes while the music of Dionysos' *auloi* is played, while divinely-inspired satyrs fulfil the initiation rituals, dances and holy purifications of Mother Goddess, rituals in which Dionysos rejoices (120-135). A second allusion is short but strong, as it is made by the prophet Teiresias who makes a eulogy of the greatness of the god and of his cult as an answer to Pentheus' accusations against Dionysos (266-327). "There are two first things among humans" Teiresias admonishes Pentheus in *Bakchai* 274-280, "Demeter, who feeds the human race, and Dionysos, who introduced wine to mankind, the only remedy against human suffering". It is also interesting to note that Iakchos/Dionysos is in both plays called συνέμφορος of the choral procession (*Bakchai* 57; *Frogs* 396), evidence for some ritual elements being common to the Eleusinian and Dionysiac cults.

The two deities were also coupled in Eleusinian rituals. Demeter and Iakchos/Dionysos famously appear in Herodotos as saviours of the Athenians during the Persian invasion of 480 in a scene that according to Herodotos was reported to him by Dikaïos son of Theokydes, an Athenian exile who had accompanied the Persian army in its invasion of Greece.<sup>519</sup> From afar Dikaïos and his companion observed a cloud of dust, as thirty thousand people would

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<sup>519</sup> Herodotos 8.65.

produce marching in procession,<sup>520</sup> floating from Eleusis through the plain, and heard the loud, ritual cry of Iakchos! that traditionally accompanied the mysteries' procession to Eleusis. As the cloud floated towards Salamis where the Athenian fleet was waiting for the arrival of the Persian fleet, Dikaïos observed that, since Attika had been abandoned by its inhabitants, the cry was surely divine (θεῖον τὸ φθεγγόμενον) and that it came from Eleusis to assist Athens. He thus predicted the disaster that would befall the Persian fleet and the defeat of the Persian invasion. Interestingly Herodotos comments on the nature of the Eleusinian initiation rituals as being open to any Athenian or other Greek who wished to be initiated (ὁ βουλόμενος μυεῖται). The allusion to the personal wish of the initiand is important as Herodotos thus stresses the voluntary and individual nature of adhesion to the rituals, as well as their panhellenic inclusiveness in one of the earliest descriptions of the rituals.

The emphasis given by Euripides and Aristophanes to the two Athenian mystic deities is thus significant. In Herodotos there is evidence for the cults of Dionysos and of Demeter being associated as saviours of the city in moments of particular danger, in *Bakchai* and *Frogs* they are the deities the choruses invoke in a decisive moment in the political life of Athens, where the socio-political conflict between the demos and the clubs of oligarchs was coming into the open again, as the execution of Kleophon and the coup of the Thirty demonstrated a few months after the performances of the plays.<sup>521</sup>

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<sup>520</sup> The number of thirty thousand cannot be interpreted literally, as it often simply indicated a great multitude: see for instance the number applied to the voting demos in Herodotos 5.97, a numerous troop in 2.163; Aeschylus *Persians* 315; Aristophanes *Birds* 1179.

<sup>521</sup> Lysias 12.43.



### 5.3 *Stasis* in Thebes and Athens.

We shall now turn our attention to some of the themes that *Frogs* and *Bakchai* have in common and start with their similar definition of the religious and political crisis of the polis of Thebes and that of Athens, the central theme of both plays. The sites of the plays correspond to the two theatrical genres: Aristophanes sets his play in Hades and all his references are to his contemporary Athens, while Euripides sets his tragedy in mythical Thebes, in Zeitlin's words, "the idealized city on whose other terrain the tragic action may be pushed to its further limits of contradiction and impasse".<sup>522</sup>

Both authors emphasise the domestic, moral and political nature of the polis' crisis: in *Bakchai* the conflict between Dionysos, the community of mystery initiates and the polis' tyrant that causes a division in the polis, in *Frogs* the polarity between and the *thiasos* of initiates and the political leaders ruling the ekklesia in the first part of the play and that between the symbolic figures of Aeschylus and Euripides in the second part.

First of all, let us examine the centre of the political reflection in *Bakchai* and *Frogs*. Pace the majority of scholars, the political theme of the polis is at the very core of the two plays. The term polis, mostly used in the sense of "people", "political and religious community",<sup>523</sup> "body politic", "state", rather than a physical place where people live (in *Bakchai* this would be *χθών*, as in 1, 15, 48 etc. or *γῆ*, as in 23, 213, 312, 664), recurs some eleven times in *Frogs* and some

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<sup>522</sup> Zeitlin 1990 p. 144.

<sup>523</sup> Chantraine 1984 ad loc., vol. II, p. 926, and LSJ ad loc., oppose the term to *ἄστυ*, which denotes the physical dwelling place of the community.

seventeen times in *Bakchai*. In *Bakchai* “polis” is a term that Euripides uses repeatedly in connection with its opposition to its tyrant’s refusal to recognise Dionysiac rituals and the god’s divine status. Thebes is the first polis in Hellas (20) that must learn what it is to be uninitiated in his mysteries (ἀτέλεστος) (39), Dionysos declares, the first polis in which the god will establish his initiation rituals (ἐμὰς τελετάς) (22) and able to “see” the divinity (610). Before the tyrant and the deity, the polis is one, with no distinctions: as Pentheus rejoices at the crowd at the gates of the polis as the polis magnifies the name of Pentheus (πολλοί, τὸ Πενθέως δ’ ὄνομα μεγαλύνῃ πόλιν), Dionysos would delight at being honoured in the same way, Teiresias warns Pentheus (320). In its emphasis on the inclusion of all members of the community in the construction of her temple, the nature of the polis of Thebes before the deity is analogous to the πᾶς δῆμος that Demeter orders to build her temple in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* 271.

The same emphasis on the community in its entirety and in its opposition to its rulers that we note in *Bakchai* is found in *Frogs*. In this sense in *Frogs* 361, 704 and 1423 it is the community of Athenians that is going through a storm, τῆς πόλεως χειμαζομένης (361), and in 686 it is the whole community that the chorus advises and teaches what is good. The term polis (ἡ πόλις) is used again in the same sense in 732, 1049, 1083, and emphasised three times in Dionysos’ explanation of his mission to save the polis in 1417-1423 and again in 1436. It is coupled with “fatherland”, πάτρας, by the character of Euripides in 1429, then used again in 1431, 1432, 1457. In 1501 it marks Pluto’s welcoming Aeschylus’ victory in the agon, and in the last verses that conclude the play in 1530 it marks the chorus sanctioning his mission to give great ideas that will bring great good things, μεγάλων ἀγαθῶν ἀγαθὰς ἐπινοίας, to the polis.

Why did both authors focus on the ethical, religious and political disunion of the polis? Why did they do so in that particular moment in the history of Athens? The exclusive focus on domestic political and religious matters seems perhaps paradoxical to a modern reader, who would tend to assume, with the insight of what was to happen in 404, that the pre-eminent thoughts of Athenians would be focused on Athens' precarious military position. On land, the occupation and fortification of Dekeleia had hurt Athens materially and psychologically, depriving Athens of the territory of Attika and its fields and orchards, of access to the Laurion silver mines and to the sanctuary of Eleusis and to the other sanctuaries outside Athens' walls. What would have been the consequence of losing control over the Dardanelles would have been clear to the Athenians of 405. Athens would have found itself with no bread, no allies, no money and no ships, and besieged by land and sea.<sup>524</sup> A defeated Athens could expect to be treated the same way the Athenians had treated other poleis during the war, such as the Melians, of whom they had killed all the men and enslaved the women.<sup>525</sup>

One element that may well have had the effect of exacerbating the conflict in the polis was the project to naturalise a number of non-Athenian citizens, at the centre of Aristophanes' political plea in *Frogs*.<sup>526</sup> The extraordinary effort needed to prepare and man a new fleet of one hundred and ten ships to help Konon who was under siege in Lesbos,<sup>527</sup> is evidence for Athens' increasing difficulty in pursuing the war against an adversary who had now the financial

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<sup>524</sup> Xenophon *Hellenika*, 2.2.3, 2.2.10.

<sup>525</sup> Thukydides 5.116.4.

<sup>526</sup> Aristophanes *Frogs* 33, 190, 693-4.

<sup>527</sup> Xenophon *Hellenika* 1.17-19, Diodoros 13.78-79.

support of the Persian king.<sup>528</sup> The fact, reported by both Diodoros and Xenophon,<sup>529</sup> that metics, foreigners and slaves were allowed to join the fleet and promised full citizens' rights in return confirms that Athens had reached its limit in manpower and had to resort to measures . The promise had unintentional consequences, as it may well have raised the resentment of existing citizens because of the dilution of their economic and political power and contributed to the political tensions in the city.

Still, there are no allusions to the war, to its past costs in terms of lost lives or material damages, in either *Frogs*, apart from the ones I noted, or in *Bakchai*. In both plays the central question is a domestic religious, ethical and political issue: *stasis*. Because of the complex role played by *stasis* in Greek political consciousness, this is not surprising. For instance, civil war, *stasis*, takes precedence over external war in Plato's *Laws* as the main danger facing a community.<sup>530</sup> The only solution to a divided family is reconciliation (διάλλαξις), Plato writes, using the term that we observed in Xenophon's rendition of the democratic revolt against the Thirty (see 4.3) and the same concept applies to the polis' lawgiver, he who brings harmony to the community (συναρμόζει). Internal concord can only be reached by the establishment of mutual friendship and peace by conciliation and takes precedence over external war, Plato concludes. A similar concept characterises also the definition of *stasis* in Aeschylus' *Eumenides* 864-866 we noted in 3.4, where external war is blessed, but only if there is no battling of birds within the home.<sup>531</sup> This vision of conciliation as solution to the divisions of the polis is at

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<sup>528</sup> Xenophon *Hellenika* 1.18.

<sup>529</sup> Xenophon *Hellenika* 1.24 Diodoros 13.97.1.

<sup>530</sup> Plato *Laws* 628a-c.

<sup>531</sup> "Θυγαῖος ἔστω πόλεμος ... ἐνοικίου δ' ὄρνιθος οὐ λέγω μάχην"

the base of the mystic/civic ideology expressed by the choruses in *Bakchai* and *Frogs*, a theme we shall discuss in 5.9-5.12.

A few notes on the concept of *stasis* are now necessary. Among other meanings *stasis* designates “faction, sedition, discord, division, dissent, strife, quarrel, contention” (LSJ). It is a term that defines a large variety of different phenomena: political altercations between citizens, local public dissension on civic matters, social unrest, political assassinations, insurrection against the government, socio-political revolutions and full-fledged civil war.<sup>532</sup> The concepts of *stasis* as the enemy of the community, and the moral duty to reject it, have ancient roots in Greek ethical and political thought.<sup>533</sup> In a manner similar to the perception of the threat of tyranny, the concept of *stasis* served as the way the community defined itself and its civic goal of harmony and concord.

In their treatment of this fundamental theme in Athenian political thinking, Euripides and Aristophanes follow an ancient tradition. As Finley for instance points out, the approach to *stasis* by Greek political writers has been unanimous, as is their insistence on the polis standing outside class or other factional interests.<sup>534</sup> *Stasis* was considered as preventing the orderly organisation of the workings of the polis that worked through the harmonisation of dissimilar but fundamentally homogeneous elements. For instance, in *Politicus* 310e-311c Plato famously compared the polis as the

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<sup>532</sup> For an examination of the modern rendering of the term see for instance Finley 1973, p. 28, Loraux 1997, pp. 21-62, and Kalimtzis 2000, pp. 3-7.

<sup>533</sup> Among the vast literature on *stasis* the following works should be mentioned: Lintott 1981, Loraux 1997, pp. 21-62, Fisher 2000 pp. 83-123, Kalimtzis 2000, Van Wees 2008 pp.1-39, Berent 1998 pp. 331-362 and 2000, pp. 257-289, B. Gray 2015.

<sup>534</sup> Finley 1973 p. 29.

product of the art of ruling by weaving together (βασιλικῆς συνυφάνσεως ἔργον) different ethical values, beliefs and opinions into a smooth, well-woven fabric (λεῖον καὶ εὐήτριον ὕφασμα), a magnificent cloth that clothes all the inhabitants of the polis, both slaves and free, and holds them together,<sup>535</sup> a metaphor that Aristophanes for instance uses as a way to bring the polis back to cohesion in *Lysistrata* 574-586.

This approach to the issue of *stasis* has ancient roots. In Homer for instance, public civic and political dissent is defined as impious and deserves exclusion from the community. At the beginning of Book 9 of Homer's *Iliad*, the Achaean army has retreated before a successful sortie commanded by Hektor.<sup>536</sup> A bitter discussion takes place in the assembly between Agamemnon, who wishes the army to sail back to Greece, and Diomedes, who accuses Agamemnon of cowardice. The old *mantis* Nestor then intervenes warning Diomedes severely, stating the gravity of breaching the unwritten laws governing the community.<sup>537</sup> He who thirsts for the chilling war among his own people shall be deprived of his tribal links (ἀφρῆτωρ), Nestor says, he shall find himself outside the law (ἄθέμιστος), and shall have no family and no home (ἀνέστιος). The emphasized three a-privative adjectives have special authority as spoken by the wise Nestor to one of the army's leaders and express in full the community's rejection of internecine conflict on religious, moral and civic grounds, a pattern that we followed in the accounts of Greek historians in chapters 3 and 4.

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<sup>535</sup> Aristophanes for instance uses a similar weaving metaphor as a way to bring the polis back to cohesion in *Lysistrata* 574-586

<sup>536</sup> Homer *Iliad* 9.1-49.

<sup>537</sup> Homer *Iliad* 9.63-64.

In Hesiod, *stasis*' synonymous deity, Strife (ἔρις), is presented in the darkest theological terms as she is daughter of Deadly Night (Νύξ ὀλοή), and sister of Nemesis, Treachery and Old Age. In her turn Strife is mother of a series of personifications of evil: Toil, Oblivion, Famine, Fight, Murders, Quarrel, Treachery, Lawlessness and Ruin and other horrid deities.<sup>538</sup> In *Works and Days* (189-201) Hesiod depicts the future of mankind prey of strife, when families will be divided, there will be conflicts between parents and children, between guests and hosts, brother and brother, friend and friend (ἑταῖρος), there will be no goodwill for men who are true to their oaths and are just and virtuous: strength will be right, and respect (αἰδώς) will cease to be. In Solon, several political and moral concepts came to be connected with *stasis*. Hubris, unrestrained greed and lack of self-control bring to the polis an inescapable wound, that of falling into the slavery of a tyrant, which awakens civil strife and tribal war (στάσις ... ἔμφυλος πόλεμος).<sup>539</sup> Among other authors,<sup>540</sup> Herodotos notes that civil strife (στάσις ἔμφυλος) is as much worse than war waged on the basis of common consent as war is worse than peace.<sup>541</sup>

It is in Thukydides that we find the deepest analysis of what *stasis* represented for a fifth-century Athenian, those beliefs upon which *Bakchai* and *Frogs* base their political and emotional impact. One of the threads of Thukydides' narration of the Peloponnesian war is his reflections on the way *stasis*, a term he uses twenty-five times in his work, a social and political phenomenon that destroys civilisation and the religious and moral fabric of society. While often

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<sup>538</sup> Hesiod, *Theogony*, 223-230.

<sup>539</sup> Solon, Fr. 4, 9.

<sup>540</sup> For instance, Theognis 43-52; Herodotos 3.82.

<sup>541</sup> Herodotos 8.3.1. The same term is used by Demokritos fr. 249 DK.

perceived as a religious sceptic,<sup>542</sup> Thukydides, in his well-known detailed description of the effects of *stasis* in Corcyra,<sup>543</sup> a phenomenon that involved all the Hellenic world, notes the disruption *stasis* brings to the observance of religious rituals.<sup>544</sup> For Thukydides the terrible sufferings that *stasis* brings about to communities are part of human nature: they have occurred and will continue to occur as long as human nature is what it is (ἔως ἂν ἡ αὐτὴ φύσις ἀνθρώπων ᾖ) (3.82.2). Still, as long as religious rules are observed, citizens maintain their abhorrence of civil strife: in the deepest of strife between the Four Hundred and the body of hoplites who had marched on Athens from Piraeus that Thukydides describes in 8.93, the hoplites' goal was not the seizure of power for themselves, but the restoration of *homonoia* to the polis. The same issue is treated in Lysias (18.17), who observes that civic harmony, *óμόνοια*, is the greatest boon to a city, while faction is the cause of all evils; and that mutual dissensions chiefly arise from the desire of some for what is not theirs, an observation that links *stasis* to the greed of oligarchs that we observed in the case of the Thirty in 4.3.

Euripides' religious and political thought is rendered in *Bakchai* in terms that are extreme and radical. In *Bakchai* the crisis is the deepest Athenians could imagine: the division of the polis is unimaginably total, as the gender-divided community has ceased to function. The secession of women, stung with divine

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<sup>542</sup> As for instance Connor 1984 p. 208 puts it in a comment to Thukydides account of the end of the Sicilian expedition, a "stern sceptic, enlightened man ... whose theodicy surprises and perplexes." See also Price 2001, p. 235.

<sup>543</sup> Thukydides 3.70-84.

<sup>544</sup> Religion in Thukydides is still a controversial issue. Hornblower 1992 p. 170 for instance writes of Thukydides' "religious silences or distortions" and that "the religious silences of Thukydides are as scandalous as the political silences of Xenophon ... Thukydides seriously understated the religious aspects of the war he set himself up to describe", while Jordan 1986, p. 147 correctly notes: "For Thukydides religion is the underlying fabric which holds human society together and he shows how a prolonged and vicious war gradually destroys that fabric."



frenzy (32-33), deprives the community of elements vital to its existence.<sup>545</sup> As I noted in the discussion on the presence of women in theatre in 2.2, the role of women in the social and religious life of the polis was significant despite their lack of political rights: the polis could not function without them. In *Bakchai's* Thebes women have ceased weaving, an image that Euripides stresses three times (118, 514, 1236), and the essential elements of the unity of the polis, its religion, communality and solidarity of equals, are with the maenads on mount Kithairon, while the royal palace lies in ruins. Out of the control of the polis and of male authority, the city's women exercise the communal values of the polis: they are now a body as strong and cohesive as the city's soldiers, as they successfully oppose armed villagers with their *thyrsos* (761-764) and show great joy, unity and cohesion throughout the play (157-9, 743-5, 1090-1110, 1024-1152 etc.), a theme I shall explore in 5.10. Through their choral odes Asian women powerfully express the mystic and civic values along which the polis may be reconstructed, once the tyrant and his family have been disposed of.

On the opposite side of the *thiasos* of Asian and Theban maenads is only Pentheus, the city's tyrant, alone in the polis to violently oppose the god Dionysos (on the figure of Pentheus as paradigmatic tyrant see further in 5.5). The male population is addressed initially with a generic "someone" (τις) (346) in Pentheus' order to destroy Teiresias' mantic shrine and to capture Dionysos (353-357), while soldiers are ordered to prepare war against the maenads (785-786). Despite their terror of the tyrant (πόλει τάρβος) (1310), the voiceless men in Thebes do not share the tyrant's rejection of the god, to judge their attitude by the speeches of the play's male servant of Pentheus and the two messengers,

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<sup>545</sup> The secession of women from the community on political grounds is also the theme of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* and *Thesmophoriazousai*. A comparative study of the role of the mystic community of women in *Bakchai* and these plays awaits serious treatment, further to the short essay of Levine 1987.

the first a herdsman and the second Pentheus' servant. The language of their reports and of their warnings to the tyrant echoes the Dionysiac chorus' moral exhortations, which suggests a male community ready to accept the god, but fearful of the tyrant. Fear of Pentheus' sharp temper and excessive monarchical rule is paramount (668-671) but the servant and messengers speak their minds and reveal their openness to the divinity of Dionysos that the tyrant rejects. The servant reporting the capture of the god under disguise reveals that he had told Dionysos his shame (δι' αἰδοῦς) (441-442) and that he was obeying the order of Pentheus. His message ends with an ominous warning that hints at the prisoner's divine nature: "this man has come to Thebes full of many wonders: the rest is your concern" (449-450). After his report on the maenads' behaviour on Kithairon and on the miraculous powers of the god, despite the terror that the tyrant inspires him, the first messenger warns Pentheus to receive the god into the city as he gave mortals the grape vine that stops suffering (772), and that, without wine and sex, all mankind's pleasures would cease (773-4): Dionysos is inferior to no other divinity (769-77). In having the Theban messenger warn thus the tyrant, Euripides here suggests the need for the polis of Thebes to accept and receive the deity with honour as Teiresias had hinted in 320. The pleasures given by the god have a central role in human civilisation: without them life would not be tolerable and without sex the human race would be extinguished. The male side of the polis is ready to accept the new cult, equally with the cults of other gods: the passage is of importance as it clearly defines the relationship between the polis' ruler and its citizens: fear of the tyrant is the only obstacle for the polis to honour the deity who grants mankind happiness and the polis' continuity.

The lines “I am frightened to speak free words to the tyrant, but nevertheless it will be said: Dionysos is (by nature) inferior to the gods”<sup>546</sup> (775-7) are usually attributed to the chorus. The only exception, as far as I know, is Norwood 1905, who noted “the strangely submissive tone of the chorus ... a belated timidity ... essentially inconsistent (with the report of Dionysos’ might)” but attributes them not to the messenger but to an anonymous Theban, a hypothesis correctly rejected by Dodds 1960 ad loc. I argue against Dodds and others that the lines are the logical conclusion of the messenger’s report for several reasons. Firstly, the chorus’ last words before the report had been of joy to be reunited with Dionysos, my guardian (μοι φύλαξ) (612), which would make its terror inexplicable, particularly after the collapse of part of the palace, Pentheus’ exhaustion (633-5) and the report of the divine powers of the *thiasos* on mount Kithairon. Secondly, the messenger expressed his fear of speaking freely to the tyrant before (668-71), a remark that it would be natural to repeat before expressing his open view on the need to accept the presence of the man of many wonders into the polis. Thirdly, the term for terror (τάρβος), is the same term used by Kadmos to describe Pentheus as terror to the polis (1310), which emphasises the opposition between the community and the tyrant it fears. Fourthly, the messenger’s final remark on the divinity of the god matches the tone and content of the final warning of the second messenger to the polis (1150-2) and serves as the introduction of the civic and religious warning to the polis the second messenger brings.

After the death of Pentheus the mood of the polis changes further, as the second messenger, a slave (1027), gives the Theban community a warning at the end of

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<sup>546</sup> “τάρβω μὲν εἰπεῖν τοὺς λόγους ἐλευθέρους/πρὸς τὸν τύραννον, ἀλλ’ ὅμως εἰρήσεται/Διόνυσος ἥσσω οὐδενὸς θεῶν ἔφν.”

his report on Pentheus' death. Terror is now over, and the crazed Agave is coming to the city holding the severed head of Pentheus. The messenger now openly reiterates Teiresias' warnings and the choral ethical and religious appeals, as they now appear as central concepts in Euripides' political message (see further 5.9-11). The wisest (σοφώτατος) possessions of men are moderation (τὸ σωφρονεῖν) and veneration (σέβειν) for the things of the gods (1150-2). The tyrant is dead, the threat to the polis is overcome: the second messenger's short speech opens the way for the play's exodos. The polis can be reconstructed in its unity, communality and cohesion only by accepting the divinity of Dionysos and the tenets and rituals of his cult.

In Aristophanes' *Frogs*, the polis of Athens is in grave decline and is described as gravely disjointed. Aristophanes has recourse to dramatic marine metaphors to define the crisis of the polis, as other authors did before him.<sup>547</sup> The polis is a ship struggling in heavy seas (χευμαζομένη) (359-61), closely embraced by breaking waves (κυμάτων ἐν ἀγκάλας) (704). Still, the crisis is not due to the war, but is an ethical, religious and political crisis due to *stasis*. The communities of the dead in Hades and of the living in Athens share in *Frogs* the same *stasis*, as the dead in Hades too are in *stasis* between the fans of Euripides and those of Aeschylus and their opposing characters and values, observes Aiakos (759-760). *Stasis* is presented in *Frogs* through the contrast between Athens' past and present, between the old moral and civic values that made the city rich, powerful and well-ordered, and the present decay, where the polis is torn between the values of the choral *thiasos* and those of the polis' current leaders in the first part of the play and those symbolised by Aeschylus on one side and by Euripides on the other in the second part. Aristophanes' first

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<sup>547</sup> For instance, Alkaios Fr. 208, part of a body of work known as *Stasiotika*; Theognis 667-682.

mention of domestic strife as enemy of the polis, the hateful stasis (στάσις ἐχθρὰ) (359), is significantly contained at the beginning of the chorus' parodos. Coming immediately after the religious interdiction to the impure and uninitiated to participate in the sacred dances, the appeal to exclude those who do not try to resolve *stasis* but stir it up and fan (ἀνεγείρει καὶ ὀιπίζει) its flames (360) has great emphasis. The polis' leadership is as debased as its currency (717- 737), no one is capable anymore of carrying the torch at the city festivals, as gymnasia are left empty (1087). People in Athens have forgotten a proper physical and artistic education as they spend their time sitting idly in senseless chatter with Sokrates the philosopher (1491-9). The polis has been weakened by the collapse of discipline in the army as even the crew of the *Paralos* feels free to discuss orders with their officers (1071) and the traditional financial funding of the fleet is now impossible as wealthy men have ceased to finance the navy on the pretence of poverty (1065).

The two sides are separated by class, education, ethics and attitude to religion. On one side are Athens' military and political leaders whom Aristophanes describes in scathing terms that emphasise the bitter tones of Athens' political division, tones that mirror those of *Knights*. The politically-ruling class is composed by newly arrived Thracian *xenoi* redheads, probably an allusion to the democratic leader Kleophon, people as debased as the newly-introduced bronze currency, as worthless as their forefathers, so low in class that they could not even be chosen as *pharmakoi* (730-3).<sup>548</sup> The polis is full of miserable and impious thieves of sacred offerings, of charlatan mob-monkeys, of lowly

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<sup>548</sup> Aristophanes' satirical portraits of democratic leaders should not of course be taken at face value: the disparagement of political adversaries was common in Old Comedy. Cf for instance the description of Kleon in *Wasps* 1030 ff. and *Knights* 217-9, 247-249, 258-263, 303-312 etc. and the abuse of Kleophon, soon to be a victim of oligarchs, in *Frogs* 679, 1504, 1532-1533.

under-clerks who constantly cheat the demos (1083-6). Hades is no better than Athens, populated, says Aiakos, by clothes-thieves and pickpockets, father-beaters and burglars, Euripides' fans (772-4).

On the opposite side in *Frogs* are those who formerly were the leaders of the *ekklesia*, people Aristophanes defines as the *kaloι kai agathoi* (727-9). They are people who share the same aristocratic birth, aptitude to self-control, the moral and civic formation as citizens, and the upbringing through education, athletics, membership of choruses, practice of *mousikē* and military training.<sup>549</sup> They are the people among which the polis should chose its rulers, people who share the play's choral values. In *Frogs* the polis' weakness comes from being torn by domestic quarrels, embodied in the second part of the play in the opposition between two of its tragic poets, as the character of Euripides in the play embodies the new and corrupt ways of the city and that of Aeschylus its glorious and prosperous past to which the polis must return. The polis must be saved from catastrophe (ή πόλις σωθεῖσα), in order that it could continue the performances of its Dionysiac choral festivals, Dionysos declares (1419), a concept that defines well the essence of the city's spirit that the god and the Eleusinian chorus have in common: the polis exists as a community because its members organise and share the god's festivals, participate in and watch dithyrambs and plays in the god's theatre. In *Frogs* the crisis is not inevitable, and the city may still find a solution to its weakness. The city is suffering but does so in delivering a child (ή πόλις δυστοκεῖ) (1423), waiting for a man who will save her, perhaps even the controversial Alkibiades (1422) (see 4.1).

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<sup>549</sup> *Frogs* (727-729): "τῶν πολιτῶν θ' οὗς μὲν ἴσμεν εὐγενεῖς καὶ σώφρονες/ἄνδρας ὄντας καὶ ικαίους καὶ καλοὺς τε κάγαθοὺς/καὶ τραφέντας ἐν παλαίστραις καὶ χοροῖς καὶ μουσικῇ". See also Finley 1973 p. 19.

## 5.4 Euripides and Athenian anti-tyrannical ideology

The antagonists of the mystic *thiasoi* are the tyrant Pentheus in *Bakchai* and the leaders of the ekklesia in *Frogs*. While Euripides depicts the figure of Pentheus as the paradigmatic figure of the tyrant along lines that represent the tradition of Athenian perception of tyranny, Aristophanes' depiction is coherent with his aristocratic political leaning in his criticism of the leadership of Athens at the time he was writing *Frogs*. As we shall note in 5.10, what pairs the two works is the mystic and moral grounds upon which the two authors base their condemnations.

This section is dedicated to examining the rationale of Euripides' emphasis in *Bakchai* on the figure of Pentheus the tyrant and on the opposition to the tyrant by Dionysos and the mystic *thiasoi*. What would have been the reaction of the audience to the depiction of the tyrant in *Bakchai*? In order to define this question, I shall thus focus in this section on trying to define the figure of the tyrant as political and moral symbol in fifth-century Athens and on Euripides' evolution of thoughts on the subject from *Hiketides* (written around 423) to *Bakchai* (written between 411 and 407/6).

In chapters 3 and 4 we observed how the figure of the tyrant was depicted by different authors who have in common the treatment of the tyrant as a figure of popular hatred and fear, as a guide to define the concept of tyranny in the collective conscience of Athenians. The legend of Kylon associates him with a popular rising against him, with the anti-tyrannical characterisation of the Alkmaionids, with *stasis* and collective mystic purification; the spectre of

tyranny is evoked in the case of Miltiades and Alkibiades; the regime of the Thirty came to be interpreted by Xenophon through anti-tyrannical lenses and associated with a successful democratic revolt under mystic inspiration. Fifth-century literature and particularly Greek tragedy is rich in depictions of figures of tyrants to define the polis in contrast with them.<sup>550</sup> Despite the dissimilarity of the authors' approaches, the figure of tyrants (and would-be tyrants) shared several morally negative characteristics: isolation, wealth and greed, ungodliness, hubris, self-indulgence, spite for others, violence. The collective view of the evils of tyranny played, in Raaflaub's words, "a perhaps indispensable role" as an object of popular hatred, useful as a tool for the polis in defining its democratic self-identity and its civic and moral values.<sup>551</sup> As Mitchell puts it, "Athenian democracy defined itself against autocracy".<sup>552</sup> In Old Comedy, "the concept of tyranny played a significant role in creating the ideology and enforcing the regime of radical democracy", as Henderson writes.<sup>553</sup> Athenian legislation against tyranny and subversion of the constitution is thought to be ancient, legislation that Ostwald traces back to Draco.<sup>554</sup> After the fall of the Four Hundred in 411, the demos' anti-tyrannical, democratic stance came into the open with the passing of the decree of

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<sup>550</sup> Cf. for instance Herodotos well-known depiction of the figure of the tyrant in the Otanes' speech (3.80); Aeschylus' anti-tyrannical stance includes *Persae*, where he contrasts Athenian democracy with Persian tyranny as Athenians are not slaves (δοῦλοι) or subjects (ὑπῆκοοι) to anybody, and for this reason are stronger in arms than the army of people subject to tyranny (242-244); Sophokles' *Antigone* (507), where the tyrant has unchecked freedom of action; Euripides' *Herakles* (141, 251), where the relationship between the tyrant and the Heraklids is that of master and slaves; Sophokles' *Antigone* where the figure of the tyrant is associated with Kreon's greed for money (1056); Sophokles' *Ajax*, where Agamemnon declares "it is not easy for a tyrant to be pious (εὐσεβεῖν)" (1350); Sophokles' famous second stasimon of *Oedipus Tyrannos*, where the tyrant and his impious hubris are the ruin of the polis (873-896) etc. Cf. Lanza 1969 (1977), particularly chapters 2 and 4 and Seaford 2003.

<sup>551</sup> Raaflaub 2003 p. 59.

<sup>552</sup> Mitchell 2013 p. 162.

<sup>553</sup> Henderson 2003 p. 156.

<sup>554</sup> Ostwald 1955 pp. 103-128. Rhodes 1993 pp. 220-221 lists in chronological order the evidence for the legislation.



Demophantos in 410 that requested all Athenian citizens to swear a democratic oath in public. As befits Athenian constitutional matters, the wording of the oath was thought to be as old as Solon, as Andokides reports.<sup>555</sup> The Solonian law, inscribed on a stele in front of the Bouleuterion, provided that anybody who holds any public office after the overthrow of democracy (δημοκρατίας καταλυθείση), may be slain with impunity, shall be sanctioned by divine law (ὅσιος), and his slayer shall come into possession of the property of the slain. The same law is referred to in the *Constitution of the Athenians* as θέσμια πάτρια, confirming its ancestral status.<sup>556</sup>

The wording of the oath of Demophantos, that became obligatory for all Athenian citizens to swear in 410,<sup>557</sup> is evidence for the urge to establish a radical form of democracy to oppose imminent threats from would-be tyrants and oligarchs after the fall of the Four Hundred and the reestablishment of democratic rule. It also significantly identifies new enemies of democracy beyond those holding any public office after the overthrow of democracy: oligarchs, (whoever suppresses democracy in Athens) and whoever attempts to become tyrant or his supporters. It also significantly calls him a war enemy of the polis (πολέμιος). The oath also establishes an explicit connection with the other powerful symbol of anti-tyrannical democratic ideology, as each Athenian citizen committed himself to materially support the tyrant-slayer and his children as Aristogeiton and Harmodios had been supported.

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<sup>555</sup> Andokides *De Mysteriis* 95-98.

<sup>556</sup> *Constitution of Athenians* 16.10.

<sup>557</sup> Shared for instance by another oath pronounced by the *Heliasts*, the demos in its judicial capacity, that states that each of the Heliasts would never vote in favour of tyranny or oligarchy. Cf. Demosthenes 24.149.

Mostly unnoticed by scholars,<sup>558</sup> the way the collective oath ceremony was to be performed, its place and timing, was highly significant because of its associations with the Dionysiac cult and with anti-tyrannical ideology, which strengthens Seaford's argument that tragedy was a creation of the polis to celebrate the aetiology of the cult of Dionysos and that the figure of the hostile tyrant was an essential tool in its definition.<sup>559</sup> All Athenian citizens, organised militarily by tribes and demes, were called to pronounce the oath of Demophantos in conjunction with a religious ritual performed in due form (καθ' ἱερῶν τελεῶν), at a date just before the start of the City Dionysia festival (πρὸ Διονυσίων).<sup>560</sup> Shear convincingly argues that the ceremony involved all male citizens of Athens, a crowd of probably some 30,000 people in that period,<sup>561</sup> meeting in the centre of the city, and performing civic and religious rituals as preparation of the Dionysiac festival, rituals that emphasise the unity and cohesion of the polis, such as the display of the allies' tribute and the parading of the war orphans. Shear argues that evidence points in the direction of the meeting taking place in the agora, and not in another possible location, such as the sanctuary of Dionysos.<sup>562</sup>

If Shear's hypothesis on the agora is correct, the collective oath ceremony took place in a site charged with powerful religious and civic symbolism. The crowd would assemble at the *lithos*, the oath stone located in the north-western part of the agora, near the *eschara*, an altar that was one of the stop-overs of the

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<sup>558</sup> With the exception, to the best of my knowledge, of Shear 2007 pp. 148-160.

<sup>559</sup> Seaford 2003 pp. 95-115.

<sup>560</sup> Andokides *De Mysteriis* 98.

<sup>561</sup> Hansen 1988 p. 12.

<sup>562</sup> I may add that the size of the crowd would have made the ceremony difficult to perform in the theatre of Dionysos or in the Odeion (see 2.1-2).

Dionysiac parade that was to take place the following day.<sup>563</sup> To the south the crowd would have stood around another powerful anti-tyrannical symbol, the statues of the Tyrannicides, the symbol of the struggle against tyranny and the fight for liberty in Athens, a “conflict flagrantly displayed as an integral dimension of the democratic political experience”.<sup>564</sup>

In order to put the civic and mystic content of *Bakchai* in context, we may turn to the way Euripides’ political stance developed in time. Evidence for this lies for instance in Euripides’ treatment of the theme of tyranny, Eleusinian cult and democracy in *Hiketides*, a play Euripides produced at some date between 424 and 420.<sup>565</sup> This drama, if compared with the later *Bakchai*, is evidence for the development in Euripides’ political thought and one that sheds some light on of the continuity of the political implications of the mystery cults in Athens and its opposition to tyranny, a theme at the centre of *Hiketides* but rarely touched by scholars.<sup>566</sup> In *Hiketides* Euripides focuses on the conflict between Kreon, Thebes’ irreligious and impious tyrant, and the community of pious mothers of Argive warriors fallen in battle before Thebes’ walls who wish to bury their dead, headed by Aithra, queen mother of Athens, and the chorus of the children of the fallen, headed by Adrastus, king of Argos. As is the case of *Bakchai*, the play’s anti-tyrannical stance embodies the complex religious and civic process of the political self-definition of Athenians. The choice of Thebes, a city that Athenians traditionally connected to the excesses of tyranny, is meaningful in both *Bakchai* and *Hiketides*. As Morwood notes,<sup>567</sup> the massacre of

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<sup>563</sup> Cf. Sourvinou-Inwood 2003 pp. 92-94.

<sup>564</sup> Azoulay 2017 (2014) p. 3-7.

<sup>565</sup> Morwood 2007 p. 27.

<sup>566</sup> With the exception of the recent work by Danes 2011 pp. 17-30.

<sup>567</sup> Morwood 2007 pp. 20-2.

war prisoners by Thebans and Spartans after their victory in 427 over the city of Plataea, traditional ally of Athens, made Thebes a symbol of what Athenians believed themselves not to be: impious, brutal, and ruled by tyrants. In *Hiketides*, the antithesis between Athens' democratic and religious values and Kreon, the haughty tyrant of Thebes (σεμνὸς τύραννος) (384), is illustrated vividly. As in Sophokles' *Antigone*, the conflict arises from the impious breach by Kreon, ruler of Thebes, of one of the *patrioi nomoi*, the duty to bury the dead in a religious ceremony, a fundamental religious duty for the Athenians described for instance in Thukydides' treatment of *stasis* in Corcyra<sup>568</sup> and key to the interpretation of the Arginousai trials' outcome (see 4.2). In the play the contrast is between the benevolent and democratic champion of Athens, Theseus, who comes to the Argive mothers' aid as Athens' traditional value of religious piety command and his mother asked him to do, and the arrogance of Kreon's messenger in his defence of the decision of Kreon not to allow the ritual burial of fallen Argives. The antithesis between the impiousness of the Thebans and of their tyrant Kreon and the figures of the Athenians, Theseus and his mother Aithra, animates the play. This contrast also animates the political antithesis between democratic and generous Athens and violent tyrannical Thebes (308), that runs along similar lines to the contrast between the *thiasos*' purity and morality and the tyrant Pentheus in *Bakchai*. The Thebans' impiousness (νόμῳ ἁτίζοντες θεῶν) (19), ἄνομοι (45), is emphasised throughout the play (for instance in 123, 311) in contrast with the religious principles, generosity and piety of Theseus and the Athenians (189, 335-345, 365-380 etc.).

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<sup>568</sup> Thukydides 3.70-84.

Although mystery cults do not have a direct and open role in the play, the place where the play is set is significant as it emphasises for the whole duration of the play the visible and constant presence of the Eleusinian cult. Instead of taking place in Thebes or Athens as would have been logical, the play takes place in Eleusis opposite to the temple of the goddesses, a location that would have been known to a majority of Athenians and one that would have raised a powerful web of spiritual and political connection in the mind of the play's audience. The continuous visual presence of the Eleusinian cult would have been an integral element of the impact of the play on the audience, and a powerful reminder of the opposition between mystic cults, tyranny and *asebeia*. This strong visual element is accompanied by several Eleusinian motifs throughout the play. The first word of the prologos is Aithra's prayer to the goddess is her invocation to "Demeter, guardian of this land of Eleusis". It is to the holy hearth of the two goddesses (πρὸς ἀγναῖς ἐσχάραις δυοῖν θεαῖν) that Aithra declares to have come in solidarity with the women of Argos (33-4). The day where the play is set has also a high significance in its religious Eleusinian implications, as Aithra is in Eleusis to perform sacrificial rituals on behalf of the land's crops (28-9): it is the day of the Proerosia, the rites performed in the autumn "before ploughing", the Eleusinian festival that commemorates the beginning of agriculture, founded when Demeter came to Athens to instruct Triptolemos on the art of agriculture according to the Parian Marble.<sup>569</sup> The figure of Demeter and her mysteries permeates the play: her mysteries are touched on in 173, in 260 Demeter is defined as the fire-bearing goddess, in 261 and 271 Demeter and Persephone are invoked by the chorus as witnesses to the failure of the women's supplications, in 290 Theseus warns his mother not to cry by the holy hearth of the goddesses, in 392 Theseus describes his army

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<sup>569</sup> FGrHist. 239A12-15, in Robertson 1996 p. 320.

ready to march to Thebes as it camps in Demeter's holy grounds, and Evadne declares her wish to join her dead husband in the bridal chambers of Persephone in 1022. The play's setting also emphasises the powerful connection between death rituals and the Eleusinian assurance of a blessed afterlife expressed in the Hymn, as noted by Sourvinou-Inwood.<sup>570</sup> The immortality of ritually buried initiates is hinted at by Theseus who warns Kreon's messenger to maintain the laws of all Greeks by allowing the bodies of the dead to return to the earth and their souls to heaven (πνεῦμα μὲν πρὸς αἰθέρα, / τὸ σῶμα δ' ἐς γῆν) (533-4), an appropriate remark made in Persephone's holy grounds, from which the chorus warns Adrastus to rise (271).

As in *Bakchai*, against this mystic background the play is also a reflection on traditional political themes, such as tyranny, democracy and the social and political balance of the polis, concepts that we saw ran deep in Greek political thought. *Hiketides* narrates the aetiology of the basic concepts of Athenian democracy. The definition of tyrannical and democratic political regimes is treated through the conflict between the figures of Kreon's herald and that of Theseus, legendary introducer of democracy to Athens. The role of Theseus, whom Adrastus addresses as lord of the land of the Athenians (γῆς Ἀθηναίων ἄναξ) (113), and the herald as tyrant of the land (γῆς τύραννος) (399) is emphatically qualified by Theseus: the polis is free (ἐλευθέρα πόλις), as he declares to Kreon's herald (403-5). It is the demos who is the lord (δῆμος ἀνάσσει), Theseus declares, magistrates take yearly turns, and the poor has the same political power as the rich (403-8). Theseus claims to have introduced legal and political equality to the polis (349-353, 394), a declaration that has

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<sup>570</sup> Sourvinou-Inwood 2003 pp. 313-4.

Solonian echoes: he has put the people in sole command and freed the polis with equal voting rights (ἐλευθερώσας τήνδ' ἰσόψηφον πόλιν) (353).

Nothing is more hostile to a polis than a tyrant (οὐδὲν τυράννου δυσμενέστερον πόλει), Theseus famously declares, under tyranny there are no laws common to all, and equality is no longer (429-432). The value of the middle way in moral and politics that was expounded for instance by Solon,<sup>571</sup> by Theognis,<sup>572</sup> that we noted in Aeschylus in *Eumenides*' second stasimon (see 3.4) is associated in *Hiketides* with the three classes of citizens (τρεις γὰρ πολιτῶν μερίδες), composing the polis: the upper class (οἱ ὀλβιοί), who always covet more wealth; the have-nots, envious of the rich and falling prey to worthless champions (πονηρῶν προστατῶν); but it is the third class in the middle that saves cities (σώζει πόλεις) (244), and guards whatever socio-political order that orders the polis (κόσμον φυλάσσουσ' ὅντιν' ἂν τάξη πόλις).

*Hiketides*' concepts tend to be pushed to extremes in *Bakchai*. The mystery cult theme is in *Hiketides* a powerful but largely silent background to a treatment of the values of *eusebeia*, of political equality and of the vices of tyranny. In *Bakchai*, mystery cults are openly put on stage in the person of the protagonist Dionysos and of the Asian and Theban women who compose the god's *thiasoi*. The tyrant, who in *Hiketides* is absent from the stage, in *Bakchai* is protagonist with Dionysos, and marked by the frequent, violent expressions of the tyrant's evil nature. The tyrant in *Hiketides* leads his army to defeat but survives, while in *Bakchai* Euripides emphasises the evilness of the tyrant, adopts the traditional

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<sup>571</sup> Solon Fr. 5; 10; 36.

<sup>572</sup> Theognis 43-52.

mythological theme of Dionysos' and the tyrant who opposes him<sup>573</sup> and has him ritually killed and dismembered (see 5.5). The solidarity in *Hiketides* between women, the mothers from Argos and Aithra, develops into the mystic cohesion of the female *thiasoi* in *Bakchai*. The polarity between Thebans and Athenians, between a tyrant and a democratic community, is in *Bakchai* made internal to the Theban community and thus expresses a more direct and politically sharper message to the polis. But above all, the elements that in *Hiketides* define the political polis, the mechanisms of democracy, are in *Bakchai* totally absent. As we shall see in the remainder of this chapter, in *Bakchai* the stark conflict is between Dionysos, his cult followers, and the tyrant.

## 5.5 Pentheus the Tyrant

Euripides' construction of the figure of Pentheus as tyrant is markedly more complex and more extreme than his treatment of tyranny in *Hiketides*. Far from being the incarnation of the polis' civic virtues as many scholars would have him (see 5.1), Euripides develops the concept of tyranny as the enemy of the polis that he had explored in *Hiketides* (429-432). In *Bakchai* Euripides associates several themes to the nature of Pentheus' power, the τυραννίς that he has received from his grandfather Kadmos (43-4).

The tyrant's isolation is the first of these themes, as it emphasises his isolation as ruler and his unfettered and uncontrolled absolute power: Pentheus is alone in his family and in his polis in his opposition to Dionysos. His own

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<sup>573</sup> As for instance in Aeschylus' *Edonians* and in the episodes of Lykourgos versus Dionysos in Hyginus *Fabulae* 132, 192, 242.



grandfather, Kadmos, founder of the city, is a worshipper of Dionysos, as he made a sacred enclosure of the ruins of Semele's house (10-11), and openly shares the cult of the god with the prophet Teiresias (195-6). Pentheus' mother and aunts have also joined the Theban *thiasos* on the mountain, heading the *thiasos* of Theban women. The males of Thebes are ready to accept the new god despite their fear of the tyrant (see 5.3): Pentheus is alone and proud of it. "Alone among Theban men I dare to do this", Pentheus exclaims in asking Dionysos to guide him to the *thiasos* on the mountain (961-3). The term "alone" is twice repeated in emphasis by Dionysos in his ambiguous reply, "Alone you are toiling for this polis, alone." Isolation and boundless self-confidence mark the tyrant.

The second theme is Pentheus' power as a tyrant who rules by force alone. Kadmos himself remarks of Pentheus that he was the man to whom he had given power, κράτος, over the land (213). The messenger uses the same term as he comes to the presence of Pentheus to report what he had seen on Kithairon and addresses him formally as ruler (κρατύνων), of this land of Thebes (660), and later as lord (ἄναξ) (670). The term κράτος implies force, possession, power by might.<sup>574</sup> The archaic term ἄναξ "lord, master" (LSJ) is mostly used to address deities and is far from any definition of power limited by laws. In fact, Pentheus thinks, plans and acts outside the laws: "Dwell with us, not outside the laws (οἶκει μεθ' ἡμῶν, μὴ θύραζε τῶν νόμων)", Kadmos admonishes him (331). Might, τὸ κράτος, alone does not create power, δύναμιν, Teiresias warns Pentheus (310). But Pentheus only believes in his own power: he is more powerful (κυριώτερος), than Dionysos in chains (505),

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<sup>574</sup> "Le mot κράτος, qui relève d'une racine exprimant la notion de 'dureté', signifie 'force', notamment force physique qui permet de triompher": Chantraine 1990 I, p. 578.

believing him to be human, a claim that would have sounded impious and hubristic to the audience that is aware of the divine nature of the prisoner.

As C. Segal notes, the power of Pentheus over the polis is constantly defined in terms that indicate constraint, binding, enclosing,<sup>575</sup> terms that emphasise that the only relationship he has with the citizens of Thebes is one of command. As Kadmos observes in his funeral speech over the body of Pentheus, his power comes from the terror (τάρβος) he inspires in the polis' citizens (1310).

Pentheus sees his polis not in terms of the people living in it, but as a lock of towers encircling the city, πύργον ἐν κύκλῳ (653), a prison. As he enters on stage Pentheus announces that many maenads have been caught and are in prison, guarded by wardens, while he will hunt from the mountain the rest of the *thiasos* like wild animals (228), and threatens Teiresias to be chained with the maenads (ἐν βάκχαισι δέσμιος μέσαις) (259): chain (δεσμός), is a term Euripides uses nearly obsessively eleven times in the play (226, 444, 447, 518, 615, 616, 634, 644, 648, 755, 1035). Despite having been told the magical way the imprisoned maenads freed themselves from their chains, Pentheus' interrogation of Dionysos ends with his instructions to his attendants that focuses on dark prisons (509-514). As for the maenads, whom Pentheus does not mention except with a disparaging τάρσδε, they will be sold as slaves or kept as household slaves at the looms (514), paradoxically substituting the polis' women in their domestic duties: a symbolic gesture, but useless, as slaves at the looms cannot take up the full role of the female community in the polis.

The third theme is the portrait of Pentheus as a caricature of a military leader in his hysterical but powerless hostility toward the cult of Dionysos. For the mad

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<sup>575</sup> Segal 1982a pp. 82-3.

tyrant the maenads are wild animals, not humans, unworthy of being beaten in battle (226-8, 434, 436, 451), animals to be sacrificed (796). As the audience would have realised, Pentheus' desire to slaughter the maenads (780-5), who represent the whole female side of the polis of Thebes, is the ultimate expression of the hubris of absolute power but an ultimately void threat. Madness from Dionysos (μανία Διονύσου), Teiresias had warned in 302-5, can scatter in panic even an army deployed for battle.

The fourth theme regards Pentheus' mental state that makes him unfit to rule as well as unable to perceive the cult's reality. At his entry onto the stage in the first episode he is depicted by Teiresias as in a flutter (ὥς ἐπτόηται) (214), which sets the tone of the inability of Pentheus to grasp what is happening in Thebes and to control it. The initial speech of the tyrant confirms Teiresias' description, as it is a paranoid tirade full of fantastic notions on what the maenads do on mount Kithairon, as he declares his violent hostility to the cult and terminates with threatening Teiresias the prophet himself with imprisonment (258-60). Coming after the lyrical and mystic parodos that sings the praise of the god and the happiness of his *thiasos*, Pentheus' speech oddly mixes the description of the reality of Dionysiac rituals with his own prurient sexual fantasies. Teiresias in his answer that follows defines Pentheus repeatedly as a madman (269, 312), crazy in a most painful way, (326) and observes that a man with a good tongue but no brains cannot be a good citizen (271), a man who lacks the essential quality of a member of the community, self-control (σωφροσύνη) (504). But a tyrant does not need self-control: as the first messenger timidly remarks to the tyrant, Pentheus is dominated by a wild temper and an excessive use of his royal prerogatives (670-1).

The fifth theme is centred upon those interrelated concepts composing the polis' civic and religious values we remarked through the discussion in chapters 3 and 4. The choral comment upon Pentheus' entry centres on the tyrant's impiety (δυσσεβεία), and lack of respect for divinity (263). Pentheus is the enemy of all the gods, of laws and of justice (ἄθεος, ἄνομος, ἄδικος) (995, 1015), a powerful expression of three alpha privative adjectives the chorus uses as it invokes Dionysos to define Pentheus as impious, ἀσεβής (490, 502). He is the very antithesis of those moral and civic virtues, self-control and veneration for divinity (τὸ σωφρονεῖν καὶ σέβειν τὰ τῶν θεῶν) that the second messenger recommends the polis to apply (1150-2). In the words of chorus as it moves to the tyrant's sacrifice (997-1000), Pentheus' sentiments are criminal, he is moved by a lawless rage, a man whose mind is mad, and whose spirit is frenzied. Another feature of the Athenian perception of a tyrant's character that is reflected in *Bakchai* is hubris, the moral vice Aeschylus urges the polis to avoid in *Eumenides* (517-565), the accusation that was moved against Alkibiades.<sup>576</sup> After Pentheus' initial tirade against Dionysos, the chorus defines hubris against Dionysos as unholy (οὐχ ὁσία ὕβρις ἐς τὸν Βρόμιον) (375), the hubris of a murderer (φονίου ἀνδρὸς ὕβρις) (555).

Lastly, money. An uncontrolled craving for money is one of the traits of character of the traditional tyrant, a sentiment that breaches "the ancient principles of solidarity through kinship and reciprocity."<sup>577</sup> Money makes it possible for the tyrant to raise a private army to defend himself from the demos, a practice we observed condemned in Herodotos' account of Miltiades' five hundred mercenaries (6.39.2). A private army is the opposite of what an army

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<sup>576</sup> Thukydides 6.15.

<sup>577</sup> Seaford 2003, p. 97.

was for the polis, the embodiment of its well-ordered egalitarian cohesion, a manifest declaration of the tyrant's alienation, mistrust and fear of his co-citizens. In *Bakchai* Euripides contrasts the nature of gold for the mystic *thiasoi* with what gold represents in Pentheus' mind. For the maenads, gold is free for all, part of nature, a gift of Dionysos: Mount Tmolos is rich in golden streams, exclaims Dionysos to his *thiasos* (153), golden are the wings of Purity (373) and golden is the god's *thyrsos* (553). For Pentheus gold is his own possession, its quantity measurable and exchangeable, gold is money, the unmeasurable price Pentheus is ready to pay to assuage his mad desire (ἔρωζ) to watch the maenads on the mountain (812-813). The solid gold that used to be kept under lock in the treasuries of sanctuaries has become in the hands of the tyrant in *Bakchai* just the irrelevant price of a whim.

## 5.6 Aristophanes and Athenian Political Leaders in *Frogs*

In comparison with the extreme, paradigmatic figure of the tyrant Pentheus Euripides depicts in *Bakchai*, in *Frogs* the opponent of the mystic chorus is the new class of political leaders who hold sway in the ekklesia, the demagogues.<sup>578</sup> In line with the style of Old Comedy, Aristophanes' politics in *Frogs* is closer to the Athenian reality his audience lived in, a political reality dominated since the deaths of Perikles by a different class of leaders. The leaders who succeeded him, writes Thukydides (whose aristocratic political opinions were not far from those of Aristophanes), because of private ambitions and interests (κατὰ τὰς ἰδίας φιλοτιμίας καὶ ἴδια κέρδη) allowed the conduct of the

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<sup>578</sup> Aristophanes in *Frogs* does not use the term demagogue, but only uses the verb once (419), to mean simply "to lead the demos".

government to be led by the whims of the demos, occupied themselves with private quarrels on its leadership and introduced civil discord at home (τὰ περὶ τὴν πόλιν πρῶτον ἐν ἀλλήλοις ἐταράχθησαν). They were, writes Thukydides, responsible for the disaster of the Sicilian expedition, for stasis in the polis, for Athens' allies to abandon the alliance and for the Persians giving support to the Spartans, the sum of Athenian ills at the end of the fifth century.<sup>579</sup> Aristophanes identifies the leaders of the demos in 405 in a similar tone of ethical and political condemnation. Similarly to Euripides in *Bakchai*, Aristophanes expresses the nature of Athens' cultural and political division in religious terms through the voice of the chorus of mystic initiates. In the second part of the parodos (354-368) Aristophanes voices the strongest religious act of condemnation of the enemies of the polis and of its civic, cultural and religious rules.<sup>580</sup> Aristophanes' direct political plea is expressed as a *prorrhesis*, the formula that was delivered by the two chief priests, the Eumolpidai and Kerykes, at the beginning of the Eleusinian festival that excluded from the Eleusinian rituals non-Greek speakers and murderers.<sup>581</sup> The tone is that of a *prorrhesis*, but the content is openly political. After an opening appeal to *euphemia* (a theme we shall discuss in 5.9 as present in both *Frogs* and *Bakchai*), the list of the political enemies of the chorus who are targeted in the religious exclusion is detailed and extensive and ordered by the gravity of the crime. The list starts with the religiously impure and those with no experience of mystic rituals, as well as those who had never watched, danced or sung the secret

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<sup>579</sup> Thukydides 2.65.7-11, cf. also the *Athenian Constitution* 28.3.

<sup>580</sup> Aristophanes had used a similar religious formula, a curse (ἄρκά), in *Thesmophoriazousai* (331-351) to invoke the gods against a comical mix of people whom the women of Athens are opposed to, combining would be tyrants and their abettors with deceiving lovers and cheating prostitutes.

<sup>581</sup> Isokrates *Panegyrikos* 157, describes the ritual of the proclamation by the Eumolpidai and Kerykes barring all barbarians and those guilty of murder from the sacred mystic rituals of Eleusis. See also Foucart 1914 pp. 308-13, Mylonas 1962 p. 247 n. 116, Parker 1983 pp. 281-6.

initiation rituals (ῥογία) of the Muses, nor been initiated in the Bacchic mysteries, thus stating Aristophanes' emphasis on the pre-eminence of mystic values in his political valuations. As was the case with *Thesmophoriazusai* 331-351, the chorus then turns to Athens' politics with comical sounding but serious denunciations, and marks first those who utter words of buffoonery at the wrong time (358), a note probably directed at war hardliners in the ekklesia.<sup>582</sup> The list continues most prominently with those who foment *stasis* for private gain, and are not at peace with their fellow citizens, a passage which emphasise the contrast and tension between the communality values of the polis versus the destructive self-interest of the individual, a concept common to Greek fifth-century political thought.<sup>583</sup> The list of those excluded from the chorus' sacred dances include different sorts of enemies of the cult and of the polis. First of all, traitors: corrupt office holders, those who betray forts and fleets to the enemy, the tax collectors who use their office to smuggle fleet supplies to the enemy, and those who provide funds to the Persian navy. Then the list only half-comically extends to soloists of dithyrambs who soil the altar of Hekate and politicians who nibble away at the fees of comedy writers because they have been ridiculed by them in the theatre's ancestral rituals of Dionysos. This last is an appeal, only partly comical, that stresses the educational and opinion-forming role of theatre in the life of the polis beyond its seemingly jocular tone, a fundamental civic role that Aristophanes solemnly states twice in *Frogs* (686-7

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<sup>582</sup> In *Bakchai* Euripides shares Aristophanes' denunciation of the catastrophic effects of giving heed to the powers of persuasion of political orators. In *Bakchai* (270-1), in what may well be Euripides' direct address to Athenians, Teiresias too warns the polis on the dangers a community faces when under the influence of a bold man with a fluent tongue, (δυνατὸς καὶ λέγειν οἶός), but no sense, as he is a bad citizen. This political warning is made stronger by being emphasised by the chorus with a triple alpha privative definition a few lines later: disaster (δυστυχία), is the result of intemperate mouths (ἀχαλίνων στομάτων), and of lawless folly (ἀνόμου τ' ἀφροσύνας) (386-8). Perhaps a popular notion: cf. Sophokles' *Antigone* 127-8: "Ζεὺς μεγάλης γλώσσης κόμπους ὑπερεχθαίρει".

<sup>583</sup> Cf. Solon fr. 4 and 9, Thukydides 6.24, Xenophon *Hellenika* 2.4.22.

and 1008-10). *Frogs*' political message that follows the ritual exclusion is made stronger and more formal by the closing verses, also probably belonging to the rituals: "to these I proclaim, and again I proclaim the ban, and again a third time I proclaim the ban that they stand out of the way of the initiates' dances." (369).

The figures of the political antagonists of Demeter and Dionysos and their cults embody objects of popular hatred as the tyrant in *Bakchai* and as the un-initiated, corrupt and treacherous demagogues in *Frogs*, bureaucrats and oafish democratic apes always cheating the people (1084-1086), runaway citizens, loafers, rascals, miscreants, (1014-1015). Both authors create these figures to assemble their spectators in a common religious and political sentiment, the sentiment that we have seen to animate the Athenian demos throughout the fifth century, that attachment to the cults that was at the heart of the polis self-identity and religious and civic sense of community.

## 5.7 Mystic Spaces

In stark contrast with the symbols of evil political power analysed above, Euripides and Aristophanes recreate on the stage of *Bakchai* and *Frogs* the world of mystic cults. Unlike for instance the silent presence of the Eleusis sanctuary in *Hiketides* and Dikaiopolis' family cortege in honour of Dionysos' in *Acharnians*, mystic cults are the explicit protagonists in *Bakchai* and *Frogs*. The two authors recreate the atmosphere of Dionysiac and Eleusinian initiation rituals through visual imagery, using some of the terms and descriptions that we noticed were associated with mystic initiation in 1.1. The emotional impact



of the re-enactment of that part of the rituals that was not concealed by secrecy must have been great on an audience familiar with mystic rituals and must have enhanced the effect of the plays' political content.

We shall start by analysing the theatrical location of the action of the plays, the meadows of Demeter in Hades in *Frogs*, and the Dionysiac wilderness of Mount Kithairon in *Bakchai*. Both playwrights use similar idyllic images to describe mental and physical places that may be termed as "liminal", space-time "pods" distant from the polis both geographically and mentally, outside the normal functioning of society and the polis' power structure, and outside normal human behaviour, places where the mystic rituals could be enacted in freedom.<sup>584</sup> Mystic rituals and the community of initiates are connected in *Frogs* with the grassy fields where initiates dance in mystic rituals in the underworld, the meadow (λειμώνα) where the chorus invites Iakchos to join the dances (326), places that Herakles had described as a place of myrtle groves (μυρρινῶνας) (156, 329-330) where the term "myrtle" refers indirectly to the adornments of initiates in Eleusinian mystic rituals. Eleusinian images of meadows abound in *Frogs*' parodos: the goddess' meadow is in flames (φλογὶ φέγγεται δὲ λειμών) (344), the chorus of initiates marches towards flowery meadows (ἐς τοὺς εὐανθεῖς κόλπους/λειμώνων) (373-4), light and torches illuminate a nocturnal procession to Demeter's flowery grove (ἀνθοφόρον ἀν' ἄλσος), to the goddess' flowery meadows, blooming with roses (ἐς πολυρρόδους/λειμώνας ἀνθεμώδεις) (445-450).

(441-2, 448-9).

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<sup>584</sup> Cf. Turner 1987 p. 55.

Noticed by Sommerstein only in a brief note,<sup>585</sup> and unmentioned by Lada-Richards, this key word, “meadow” (λειμών, ἄλσος), merits a short exploration of its association with mystic initiation and the heavenly place of abode of the initiated in the afterlife. For the Greeks, inhabiting for the most part a dry and rocky landscape, the afterlife world of the initiates, sometimes called the island of the blessed, was a lush flowery garden, and more generally evoked a fairy-tale garden far from the real world.<sup>586</sup> In the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* the goddess’ daughter is described “gathering flowers over a soft meadow” in an unnamed land (6-7, 417), in Pindar a lush vegetation adorns the tower of Kronos, where ocean breezes blow around the island of the blessed, and flowers of gold are blazing,<sup>587</sup> where the pious (εὐσεβεῖς) dwell in complete happiness in meadows of red roses among shady frankincense trees and trees of golden fruits.<sup>588</sup> The same places where the pious live after death is described by Plato, in *Phaedo* 111b as θεῶν ἄλση, and in *Phaedrus* 248b-c he calls “the plain of truth ... the fitting pasturage for the best part of the soul, the meadow (λειμών)”. Plutarch uses the same key terms in his description of the similarity of death and mystic initiation we examined in 1.1, when, after an experience of confusion and wandering, a marvellous light meets the wanderer, and pure places and meadows (τόποι καθαροὶ καὶ λειμῶνες) welcome him<sup>589</sup>. The association of initiates, chthonic deities and meadows also appears on one of the golden tablets found at Thurii, containing formulae of mystic initiation, a totenpass, that ends with these words: “rejoice, rejoice, you are walking to the right towards the sacred meadows and groves (λειμῶνας τε ἱερούς καὶ

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<sup>585</sup> Sommerstein 1997 p. 170, n. 155.

<sup>586</sup> See for instance Phaedra’s expression of her most intimate and impossible desires that include resting under a poplar tree in an uncut meadow (Euripides *Hippolytus* 210-1).

<sup>587</sup> Pindar *Olympian* 2.71-74. See also Solmsen 1968 pp. 503-6.

<sup>588</sup> Pindar fr. 129.

<sup>589</sup> Plutarch fr. 178.

ἄλσεα) of Persephone” and a tablet found at Pherae carries the words “enter the sacred meadow (εἴσιθ <ι> ἱερὸν λειμῶνα) as the initiate is redeemed”.<sup>590</sup>

Similar mystic-related images of nature can be found in *Bakchai*. In the play Dionysiac mystic spaces on mount Kithairon are set in stark contrast with the city of Thebes, defined by the emphasis on the city’s military aspect, an aspect of the rule of the tyrant we examined in 5.5. In contrast with Thebes, the dwelling of the maenads on the mountain is a heavenly place: the maenads relax in glens (πρὸς ὀργάδας) (445), sleep relaxed in the open (683), are like fawn playing in the verdant pleasures of a meadow (866-7), rejoice in the wilderness in the shady leaved forest (875-6). Their surroundings are idyllic: the second messenger who accompanies Pentheus to the mountain spies on maenads hidden in a grassy valley, while the maenads are intent in singing and crowning *thyrsos* sitting in a little valley surrounded by cliffs, crossed by a stream, in the shade of pine trees (1051-2). On Dionysos’ command the maenads run as fast as doves through unspoiled scenery to catch Pentheus: a valley with a stream running, swollen by melted snow and broken boulders (1093-4). Mystic spaces are Dionysos’ realm, where nature is a friend: the *thiasos* of Theban women sits in the mountain under green firs on roofless rocks (33-39). The new dwellings of the women lack the most basic shelter, the roof, and mark thus the opposition between the god’s dwellings that do not need to shelter from rain, wind or cold as do the women’s houses inside the walled city.

On the heights of the god the laws of nature are superseded by the god’s powers, a feature Euripides emphasises near obsessively in the play, and uses the term “mountain” (ὄρος) some eighteen times. On mount Tmolos the gold

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<sup>590</sup> Tablets n. 3 and 27, Graf and Iles Johnston 2007 pp. 8-9 and 38-9.

flows (154), on mount Kithairon it is nature that offers maenads goods that are normally produced by humans and used in religious ceremonies, milk, wine and honey (144-5, 704-711). Eternal snow covers Kithairon (662), but herds of cattle graze on it (677), maenads feed roes and wolf-cubs with the milk they have denied their children (699-700), while snakes lick their cheeks (698, 767-8). In peaceful harmony with wild beasts the maenads destroy herds of domesticated cattle (734-745), a detail that seems to confirm Massenzio's theory about the clash in myth between the Dionysiac collective community and a pastoral economic structure (see 5.2).

In both *Bakchai* and *Frogs* the visual aspects of the magical, heavenly surroundings of mystic cults emphasise the religious, political and moral tensions of the polis. The polarity between Thebes and Athens and the mystic spaces of the cults creates the atmosphere for the actions of Dionysos and his *thiasoi* in establishing his cult in *Bakchai* and unifying the community of Thebans. In *Frogs* they emphasise the contrast between the polis' virtuous men and its present rulers, the reason for the return of Aeschylus to Athens, a return that will save the polis of Athens, bring it back to its traditional values and to a renewed prosperity.

## 5.8 Lights in the night, Fire and Torches

As we observed in 1.1, the visual features related to lights in darkness belong to the imagery of mystic initiation in Plato and Plutarch, while they accompany the mystic discourse in Aeschylus' *Oresteia* that (see 3.4). As in the first two plays of *Oresteia*, darkness marks the action in *Bakchai* and *Frogs*. The action in

*Frogs* is set in the darkness of Hades, while the chorus marks Aeschylus' return to Athens on his salvation mission as an ascent to light (1529), while the Dionysiac rituals in *Bakchai* take place in the night, as Dionysos explains: darkness possesses solemnity (σεμνότητ' ἔχει σκότος) (486).

This visual element is of importance because of its ritual significance in mystic rituals. The mystic initiation theme of the passage from near-death to a new birth is often expressed in Greek literature through light and darkness imagery that emphasises the emotional contrast between life before and after initiation. Light in darkness marks the presence of the divine. In Eleusinian mystic initiation rituals an extraordinary light appear to the initiates in the darkness of the Telesterion, marking the liturgy's zenith.<sup>591</sup> The polarity between night and day, darkness and light, can be defined as "a dynamic paradox in all mysteries",<sup>592</sup> a feature "central to the mysteries".<sup>593</sup> The torch (λαμπάς, φέγγος, δαίς) that brings light to the darkness is a fundamental element of mystery cults. A strong light accompanies divine epiphanies in mystery cults, such as the φῶς κάλλιστον that enlightens the revelation of the perfect, simple and blissful sacred object appearing to the initiate in Plato's *Phaedrus* 250c, where terms such as "bright, radiant" (λαμπρός), "blessed sight and vision" (μακάρια ὄψεις καὶ θέα), "visions that are blessed by divinity" (εὐδαίμονα φάσματα), "pure light as bright as the sun" (ἐν ἀνγῇ καθαρόν) appear, terms we shall encounter in mystic allusions in *Bakchai* and *Frogs*. As we observed in 1.1, Plutarch describes in fr. 178 the marvellous light (φῶς θαυμασίον) meeting the soul after "every possible terror, shivering and trembling and sweating and amazement", and the μέγα φῶς appearing before the silent initiands who

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<sup>591</sup> A full analysis and sources in Clinton 2004 pp. 85-109. Cf. also Seaford 2005 pp. 602-606.

<sup>592</sup> Burkert 1987 p. 101.

<sup>593</sup> Richardson 1974 p.21.

succeed in entering the mystery portals after the crowd's tumult and shouting in trying to cross the threshold.<sup>594</sup> The moment the *hierophant* appears from the Anaktoron immersed in light, the climatic moment in Eleusinian mystic rituals, is also attested by inscriptions, such as one of the early third century that describes the *hierophant* appearing "in the bright nights",<sup>595</sup> and another in which an initiate proclaims that she will never forget "the nights shining with the beauty of the sun".<sup>596</sup> The contrast between light and darkness as applied to mystic cults pervades for instance the aetiological text of the Eleusinian cult, the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, a text structured on the antithesis between the darkness of the chthonic realm of Hades and the heavenly abode of the gods, between the goddess' dark shawl she had put on her shoulders in her grief (42) and the divine light that marks her entry into Metaneira's hall (189), between the period Persephone will spend in the misty darkness of Hades and the period she will spend in Olympos (398-403). In Aeschylus' *Oresteia* mankind's passage from a culture of divinely-sanctioned blood revenge to a man-made legal judgment system is expressed visually by the motif of torches illuminating the procession of the *Semnai Theai* to their temples (1022, 1029, 1040-1) (see 3.4). Light in the night, stars and planets are images that have a specific association with Dionysos. The chorus invokes Dionysos in the fifth stasimon of Sophokles' *Antigone* (1147-1148), where the god is called "leader of the chorus of stars whose breath is fire, overseer of the voices in the night". Similarly, Euripides in *Ion* (1074 ff) describes a Dionysos sleepless in the night watching the torch procession marching to Eleusis, and dancing beside the spring of the wonderful dances in the company of the starry sky of Zeus and the moon.

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<sup>594</sup> Plutarch *Progress in Virtue*, 81d-e.

<sup>595</sup> IG II2 3811 (=I. Eleusis 637), in Clinton 2004 p. 90.

<sup>596</sup> IG II2 4058 (=I. Eleusis 399), in Clinton 2004 p. 93.

In both *Frogs* and *Bakchai* the night is pierced by mystic lights. In *Frogs* the theme of initiation into the mysteries, signalled by the apparition of an extraordinary light, is brought on stage early in the play, in a passage of the dialogue between Herakles, Dionysos and Xanthias (136-157). Herakles' recounts what Dionysos and Xanthias will meet in Hades: after crossing a large fathomless lake in the smallest of boats, they will encounter terrifying snakes and other wild animals, then face the ordeal of walking through a terrain covered with mud and, only at the end of their initiatory journey, they will see the most beautiful of lights (φῶς κάλλιστον) that illuminates the *thiasoi* (θιάσοι εὐδαίμοναι/ἀνδρῶν γυναικῶν) clapping their hands (155-7). Images of flares are used nearly obsessively in *Frogs*: the entry of the chorus of initiates is announced by the most mystic whiff of torches (δάδων αὔρα) (312-4), flaming torches are in the hands of the god, that brilliant star of nocturnal initiation rituals (νυκτέρου τελετῆς φωσφόρος ἀστήρ) (341-343), sun and divine light shine bright on the initiates in *Frogs* and on them alone (454-5), the meadow where the chorus of initiates dances and sings is lit up with flame (φλογὶ φέγγεται δὲ λειμών) (351-3). A sacred torch (φέγγος ἱερὸν) is in the hands of the chorus of initiates as they dance in honour of Demeter (448), and bright lights illuminate the play's final scene, when Pluto orders the escort to shine sacred torches (λαμπάδας ἱεράς) to accompany Aeschylus back to the light (ἐς φάος) (1525-1529), an image that echoes the finale of Aeschylus' *Eumenides* (1002-1047), where torches, and a sacred light (φῶς ἱερὸν) (1005) accompany the procession accompanying the *Semnai Theai* to their temple with a torch devoured by fire (ξὺν πυριδάπτῳ λαμπάδι) (1041).

In *Bakchai* too, the torch is a symbol of the divinity of Dionysos: the blazing flame of the pine torch (πυρσώδη φλόγα πέυκας), appears in *Bakchai* 146 in the hands of the god who rushes around the mountain, an image repeated by

Teiresias in 307 as he describes the god leaping with pine-torches (σὺν πεύκαισι) on the Delphic rocks, an image of the Delphic rocks and fire that Euripides for instance uses in *Phoenissai* 226-228 in the context of a choral Dionysiac cult.<sup>597</sup> The god's reunion with the *thiasos* of Asian women and the destruction of Pentheus' halls mark the start of Pentheus' punishment, and images of fire and torches abound in the passage (576-641). Dionysos' cry to burn Pentheus' halls with the bright lightning torch (594), is answered by the maenads noticing in fear a fire around the tomb of Semele that Zeus lightning flame started, and expressing joy in seeing Dionysos, their greatest light (φάος μέγιστον) (608), a light that contrasts with the god's hint two lines later at the dark dungeon from which he escaped. The fire that Dionysos has lit on his mother's tomb in the god's report to the maenads immediately after marks both the divinity of Dionysos and the beginning of Pentheus' delirium (623-636). As fire signals the birthplace of the god, it signals also its presence on the locks of the maenads on the mountain, a fire that does not burn them (757).

Mystic, divine light illuminates the acme of both plays. It is a sacred fire that marks the high point of *Bakchai*, as the voice of Dionysos from heaven guides the *thiasos* to Pentheus and to the human sacrifice that kills the tyrant. As the forest falls silent a miraculous light of holy fire (φῶς σεμνοῦ πυρός), suddenly illuminates the space between heaven and earth for the duration of the sacrificial ritual (1083). In *Frogs*, the return of Aeschylus to the light of the upper world in order to save the polis of Athens that closes the play is similarly illuminated by torches, dancing and singing (1524-1527).

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<sup>597</sup> "ὦ λάμπουσα πέτρα πυρός/δικόρυφον σέλας ὑπὲρ ἄκρων/βακχειῶν Διονύσου ...".



## 5.9 The Mystic Choruses

The choruses of the plays are unique in extant tragedy and comedy as composed of mystery initiates: Asian and Theban maenads in *Bakchai* and Eleusinian initiates in *Frogs*. In the two plays, what Calame calls “the authority of the choral voice” blurs the differences between the chorus’ reality and their roles.<sup>598</sup> In both plays the chorus-members interpret the fiction represented on the stage as well as performing a ritual role as worshippers of Dionysos Eleuthereus in the actual here and now Athenian reality of the god’s theatre at the acme of the Great Dionysia. They thus impersonate the voice of the actual author of the play while interacting with the emotions of the audience. The emphasis on the cohesiveness and power of the community of worshippers is destined for audiences for whom the participation in mystic rituals would have been their most significant communal and individual spiritual experience, a public whose collective imaginary and participation in theatre plays would have been markedly different from ours (see 2.4). In both plays the enactment of mystic rituals would have made the moral and political message of the plays all the more direct and emotionally involving. The effect of choral acts on the audiences would have been profound: Henrichs defines the chorus, “a bridge between mystic secrecy and public display”<sup>599</sup> that would, in Seaford’s words, “enact its own blessed solidarity and ... the transition from individual suffering

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<sup>598</sup> Calame 2004 pp. 158-161.

<sup>599</sup> Henrichs 1994-5 p. 68: « The boundaries between the realm of the imagination and the realm of the polis were more fluid than we might think. The Athenian audience was better equipped than we are to move easily without qualms between the two realms. Much of the polis of the here and now was a construct of the imagination, composed of the fictional fragments of the past, and conversely, the mythical past was perceived as a primordial image of the polis. Tragedy functioned as one of the most effective mediators between the two realms, at least in Athens”.

to choral happiness ... in the dissolution of the normal articulation of space and time".<sup>600</sup> In the plays the chorus would in a way not only give expression to the audiences' grief and anxiety, but also create a moment of moral, religious and political collective reflection and of cohesion of the demos.

The choruses introduce and define themselves in the parodoi and they do so in a similar way, perhaps inspired by mystic rituals. Both parodoi are evidence for the intention of the authors "to communicate the ritual to the audience in a more immediate and captivating form", as F. Ferrari notes in his work on *Bakchai's* parodos.<sup>601</sup> As soon as it marches into the orchestra (*Bakchai* 64-169; *Frogs* 323-459) the choruses declare their sacred and ritual nature, a declaration that sets the tone for the rest of their similar ethical and religious interventions. The metres used suggest that both Euripides and Aristophanes felt the need to give great immediacy and emotional impact to the message of the choruses. Both parodoi use extensively the rarely used ionic metre,<sup>602</sup> a metre connected to Dionysiac worship and archaic tragedy, used for instance by Euripides in *Cyclops* 495-518 where the chorus sings a *makarismos* to the man who shouts the Bacchic cry and celebrates the joys of wine, sex and the *komos*. The Ionic metre sets the tone of much of *Bakchai's* choral songs: in the first part of the parodos (64-104), in the strophe on milk, wine and honey flowing from the ground (144-153), in the first two strophes of the first stasimon on Purity (370-401), and in the whole second stasimon (519-575). In *Frogs* Aristophanes uses it in the choral ode (324-353), while the political plea in 354-371 is in anapaests.<sup>603</sup> In *Bakchai* Euripides emphasises the mystic nature of the chorus and its possession by the

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<sup>600</sup> Seaford 2013 pp. 269-271.

<sup>601</sup> Ferrari 1979 p. 79.

<sup>602</sup> Ferrari 1979 p. 70; Seaford 1996 n. 64-169 p. 155-6; Sommerstein 1997 n. 323-353, p. 184.

<sup>603</sup> Stanford 1958 n. ad loc. p. 101; Dover 1993 n. ad loc. 235-6; Seaford 1996 n. ad loc. pp. 155-6.

deity in the parodos, a passage expressed in the Phrygian mode, as the chorus itself hints (86, 126-7, 158). The Phrygian mode, Aristotle notes in *Politics* 1340b, is a musical mode apt to make men possessed by divinity (ἐνθουσιαστικός), the most exciting and emotional mode among all modes as the *aulós* is among its musical instruments, and links it to orgiastic Bacchic emotional frenzy in *Politics* 8.1342b.

At their entry in the orchestra the two choruses, after the ritual invocation of Iakchos/Dionysos to lead the chorus (in *Frogs*) and a brief proclamation of its own nature as a *thiasos* of Dionysos' worshippers (in *Bakchai*), use in a remarkably similar way the traditional *euphemia* formula that opened Greek religious ceremonies, the ritual warning to the performers and the public not to use inauspicious language. Its use is destined to impart great religious solemnity to the song of the choruses, as for instance it does in Aeschylus' *Eumenides* 1035 (see 3.4). In *Bakchai* the chorus exclaims "let everybody by keeping sacred silence (στόμα εὐφημον) make himself pure" (70), while in *Frogs* the chorus pronounces a nearly identical formula (354-5), "let all speak fair" (εὐφημεῖν χρή).<sup>604</sup> The tone of the two songs is set in the same *euphemia* ritual tones, destined to praise and please the god and to "suggest a well-disposed deity, a pious community, and a favourable outcome".<sup>605</sup> The power of spoken words addressed to deities in religious rituals such as processions, sacrifices or the pronunciation of *horkoi* was great, and their acceptance by the divinity was thought to shape future reality.<sup>606</sup> In the parodos of *Oresteia* for instance, the concept of silence in the the watchman's declaration on his own

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<sup>604</sup> Aristophanes uses *euphemia* formulae in in other plays, see for instance *Acharnians* 237, 241, *Peace* 1316, and Euripides in *Ion* 98 with nearly identical wording. See Ferrari 1979 pp. 69-70.

<sup>605</sup> Stehle 2004 p.130.

<sup>606</sup> Cameron 1970 pp. 95-118; Burkert 1985 pp. 250-4.

silence, expressed by the image of of the ox stepping on his tongue, is connected, as Thomson argues, with a popular proverb.<sup>607</sup> The proverb was ascribed to Pythagoras, to indicate the practice of silent meditation and of the silence that his pupils had to keep for five years in their preparation for Pythagoras' teachings. Silence and *euphemia* were the behaviour expected of worshippers in religious rituals, including mystic initiation. Iamblichos for instance, compares the practice of tongue self-control with the rule of secrecy of the Eleusinian mysteries.<sup>608</sup> In other passages the ox becomes a key, that Sophokles associates with the golden key on the tongues of the Eumolpidai at the goddesses' rituals at Eleusis.<sup>609</sup> Elsewhere what is on the tongue is not a key but a door, e. g. to close the ears of domestics and of other profane and boorish people, by Plato in "a conscious allusion to its mystic origin", as Thomson observes.<sup>610</sup> The formula is made clear in its mystic association by the watchman's reference to the silence to be kept towards those not-in-the-know that follows, a formula that "sounds like an adaptation of the exordium of a *hieros logos*" in Thomson's words.<sup>611</sup> It is a theme frequently found in Greek literature, of which Bernabé, in his exhaustive list of examples, finds for instance an early example in Pindar, when the poet compares his words to fast arrows that speak only to those in-the-know, the initiates, while the majority of people needs an interpreter.<sup>612</sup>

The formula sets the tone for the choral odes in the plays and makes their moral and political pleas all the more religiously authoritative and collective. The two

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<sup>607</sup> Thomson 1938 II n. ad loc. pp. 7-8.

<sup>608</sup> Iamblichos *Life of Pythagoras* 17.72.5-8.

<sup>609</sup> Sophokles *Oedipos at Colonus* 1050-1053.

<sup>610</sup> Plato *Symposion* 218b, Thomson 1938 II, p. 8.

<sup>611</sup> Thomson 1938 II, ad loc. p. 8.

<sup>612</sup> Pindar *Olympian* 2.83-85, Bernabé 1996.

parodoi also use the same pressing ritual invitation formulae, *prokerygmata*, often expressed with double cries that “may reflect the actual practice of ritual”.<sup>613</sup> In *Bakchai* the chorus addresses to Thebans to join the choral dance (68-9), to move on in the procession escorting the god to the mountain (83, 83-4, 165), to crown themselves with ivy (104-5), to become bacchants and adopt their dress and brandish the *thyrsos* (107-114), to go to the mountain (116). In *Frogs* the chorus leader invites the chorus to move in procession to the meadows and dance (153-4, 371-5, 440-2, 447-453) to exalt and venerate the city’s divine Saviourress (376-379), to sing to Demeter (383-4), to sing in honour of the god (394-6). The emotional reunion of the chorus with Dionysos and the burning of the royal palace in the third episode (576-601) contains a repetition of double cries of joy of the chorus and of Dionysos. Similarly in *Frogs*, despite the relative lesser weight of the chorus in the play, the first words spoken by the chorus of initiates are an invocation to the god: “Iakchos, O Iakchos! Iakchos, O Iakchos!” (316-7), repeated in 325 and 342, and exclamation of reciprocal encouragement such as ἄγ’ εἶα in 396, χωρεῖτε in 444, cries that may also be taken as indirect appeals to the audience. The use of the formula emphasises the sacred solemnity of what follows: a prayer to Dionysos praising his divine nature, powers and cult in *Bakchai* and, mingled with invocations to Demeter and Iakchos, a religious and civic condemnation and exclusion from the choral dances and religious rituals of political opponents of the chorus in *Frogs*.<sup>614</sup> In both plays the prayer is a *πρόσκησις*, that religious/civic proclamation that we examined in 5.6.

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<sup>613</sup> Seaford 1996 p. 155.

<sup>614</sup> Dodds 1960 n. 68-70, p. 75, notes the similarity and comments that Aristophanes uses the formula as a parody. In view of the seriousness and centrality in the play of what follows I would doubt this.

In *Frogs* the end of the agon between the two poets and Aeschylus' victory is also marked by a *makarismos* (1482-1499) pronounced by the chorus. The chorus defines the reason for Aeschylus' victory, and simultaneously describes the qualities of a civic ideal man, the poet himself. "Blessed is the man (μακάριός ... ἄνθρωπος) who has an astute precision mind (ξύνεσιν ἡκριβωμένην) ... judged to have good sense (εὖ φρονεῖν), a man of sagacity (συνετός) ... who will bring blessings to his fellow citizens and blessings to his own friends and relations because he is a man of sagacity".<sup>615</sup> The passage may be compared with the *makarismos* in the finale of the third stasimon in *Bakchai* (902-12) that starts with Euripides' use of the sea storm analogy that Aristophanes uses repeatedly in *Frogs* (see 2.2). Euripides connects the happiness of a man who escapes a storm at sea to that felt by living as blessed by the gods (εὐδαίμων) from day to day, a metaphor that describes the daily state of happiness of initiates. The terms *makarios*, *eudaimon* refer to the bliss felt by initiates in the highest grade in the Eleusinian mysteries as noted by Thomson, and strengthen the mystic content common to *Bakchai* and *Frogs*.<sup>616</sup>

Unfortunately invisible to modern eyes and ears, music and dancing were essential features of the choruses' action on scene and had the effect of influencing emotionally the audience and compounding the weight of the verbal expressions. Both authors emphasise the freedom, civic and religious piety, communality and joy of the initiates through their descriptions and enactment on stage of the choral dances, songs and music. In *Bakchai* the noun and verb "dance" (χορός, χορεύω) are used some eighteen times, in *Frogs* some fifteen times. Terms connected with choral dancing and singing are remarkably

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<sup>615</sup> The same quality attributed to Theramenes in calling Alkibiades back to Athens in 411, see Diodoros 13.42.2.

<sup>616</sup> Thomson 1938 Vol. I, p. 40-41.

similar in the plays and may highlight the similarity of Dionysiac and Eleusinian choral rituals in *Bakchai* and *Frogs*. The choruses dance and sing to the tune of Dionysos' musical instruments, the reed pipe (αὐλός), in *Frogs* 154, 212, 312, 513, 1302 and in *Bakchai* 128, 160, 380. Both plays introduce the instrument with a similar expression: (αὐλῶν πνεύμα) in *Bakchai* 128, and (αὐλῶν πνοή) in *Frogs* 154.

Dances' ritual movements are also parallel in the plays: the stomping of feet in the dance (*Frogs* 331, 375, *Bakchai* 863-4), shaking heads in the air in the dance (*Frogs* 328; *Bakchai* 150, 240-1, 865). In the plays Euripides and Aristophanes use the same definition for the relationship between the chorus and the deity: Iakchos/Dionysos is companion (συνέμπορος) of the chorus (*Bakchai* 57, *Frogs* 396). Dancing, joy and laughter marked Greek religious ceremonies and had a particular cathartic role in mystic rituals. In the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* the moment the *agelastos* goddess ceases her mourning for her daughter at the house of Keleos is marked by her smile and laughter (200-5), which would suggest the aetiology of the use of obscenities and laughter during mystic rituals, as it is attested in other festivals such as the Haloa, the Thesmophoria, the procession to Eleusis, and in Dionysiac processions.<sup>617</sup> As gods were thought to be lovers of games (φιλοπαίσμοι) (Plato, *Kratinos* 406c) *euphemia* bars the chorus in the plays from using expressions that would displease them: terms of grief, pain, lamentation would have been excluded on this base. In *Bakchai*, the chorus' joy is also frequently stressed with words such as ἡδύς in 66 and 135; the chorus laughs with the pipes, (μετά τ' αὐλοῦ γελάσαι) (380); Dionysos is the laughing god in 439 and 1020; the verb χαίρω is used in 134, 423, 1006, 1033, 1040 and in *Frogs* 244, while in *Frogs* the term most frequently

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<sup>617</sup> See on the subject Halliwell 2008 pp. 155-214.

used to define the chorus activity is παίζω: used in 230, 319, 334, 375, 388, 392, 407, 411, 414, 523.

At the centre of the plays is the joy, cohesion, communality and religious and cultic observance of the choruses. This would have played an emotional chord in the spectators, as most of them would have been partners in choral activities that were an essential part of Athenian religious and civic education. The audiences would then be drawn into identifying themselves with the chorus and its political and religious message, subject of the next section.

#### 5.10 Mystic/Moral Values.

Concepts such as τὸ σοφόν, σοφία, εὐδαιμονία, ἡσυχία, σωφροσύνη, εὐκοσμία play an essential role in *Bakchai* and *Frogs* in being antithetical to *stasis*. In contrast with the human and evil nature of *stasis*, the terms defining wisdom, happiness, wealth, civic harmony, self-control and cohesion all have mystic, moral and political implications. In this section we shall examine those beliefs in the context of *Bakchai* and *Frogs*, values that are remarkably similar in the two plays.

The nature of positive or negative human or divine wisdom, σοφός/τὸ σοφόν/σοφία, terms that appear some 25 times in the play, is central to the philosophical, religious and political content of *Bakchai*. The interpretation of the passages where τὸ σοφόν is defined in *Bakchai* have been a matter of great controversy amongst scholars, giving rise to opposite visions of the play, of Euripides' depiction of Dionysos, of his cult and of the play's philosophical and



political significance. The concept of wisdom and the use of the cognate terms σοφός, τὸ σοφόν/ σοφία etc. is in *Bakchai* complex and sometimes ambiguous. Euripides uses the whole range of the meanings of these terms in the play in a manner that would have been probably clear to his audience, but less to us. The modern clear distinction between different meanings such as “skilled crafting”, “intellectual trickery”, “bit of wisdom”, “cleverness”, “knowledge” and “mystic wisdom” may not have been as clear in fifth-century Athens, where the positive and negative aspects of the concepts may have overlapped and their meaning may only have been clear in their context. Scholars have attempted to define precisely the use of the terms that express in *Bakchai* the notion of “sophistic reasoning”, “cleverness” versus “knowledge”, “wisdom”, and have often come to opposite conclusions.<sup>618</sup> Leinieks for instance believes that τὸ σοφόν means “wisdom”, while σοφία means “cleverness”,<sup>619</sup> although for instance Arthur<sup>620</sup> comes to the opposite conclusion. In order to evaluate the concept of wisdom in *Bakchai* it is worthwhile to follow the thread of the concept in its contexts as Euripides develops it through the play,<sup>621</sup> before turning to examine the modern controversy.

The mystic association of the concept of σοφός is established early in *Bakchai*. I argue that, unnoticed by most scholars, Euripides associates the concept of σοφός with the knowledge acquired in mystic initiation and marks it in opposition to Pentheus’ lack of it. Euripides introduces the term σοφός in the

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<sup>618</sup> Scholars have been discussing extensively the term τὸ σοφόν and σοφία and their meaning in *Bakchai*, cf. for instance Willink 1966 pp. 229-231, Cropp 1981 pp. 39-42, Leinieks 1984 pp. 178-179, pp. 39-42, Reynolds-Warnhoff 1997 pp. 77-103, Schein 2016 pp. 257-273.

<sup>619</sup> Leinieks 1984 pp. 178-179.

<sup>620</sup> Arthur 1972 pp. 159-179.

<sup>621</sup> Willink 1966 n. 3 p. 230: “We should not repine at our inability to find a perfect equivalent: the whole point is that τὸ σοφόν is an ‘unknown’ which it is one purpose of the drama to evaluate.”

opening lines of the dialogue between the two old friends, Teiresias and Kadmos, both wise men because they have accepted the cult of Dionysos (Kadmos in 10-11, Teiresias in 176-177). The figure of Teiresias is introduced as he states his reason for having come to the royal house, to join the rituals in honour of Dionysos together with his old friend Kadmos (176-177). As he comes out of the palace to welcome Teiresias, Kadmos declares he recognised the wise voice of a wise man, a concept emphasised through the use of a repetition of the term σοφός (178-9), a term Kadmos uses again a few lines later to address his friend Teiresias (186). Kadmos then connects wisdom with the participation in mystic cult rituals: it consists of glorifying Dionysos with all one's energy, wearing the cult's garb, striking the ground with the *thyrsos* and joining the communal dances in his honour (180-8). The adherence to the cult makes the two old men not only wise, but the only men in Thebes in their senses (μόνοι γὰρ εὔφρονοῦμεν) (195), a term that introduces the notion of prudence, sound judgment and common sense into that of mystic wisdom, a theme that accompanies the development of the notion of civic/mystic ethical themes in the play. The notion of σοφός as one initiated in the mysteries is again asserted by Dionysos in his dialogue with Pentheus on the subject of initiation rituals (465-490), that Pentheus perceives as riddles, while for Dionysos it does not make any sense (οὐκ εὔφρονεῖν) to speak of wise things to a non-initiate (ἀμαθεῖ σοφὰ λέγων). On the opposite side stands Pentheus, who throughout the dialogue between Pentheus, Teiresias and Kadmos that follows is constantly depicted as unwise, lacking judgment, prey of madness (μαίνομενος) (269-271, 310-312, 326, 332, 358-359, 369 etc.), as a result of his rejection of Dionysos' divinity. It is Dionysos who is emphatically declared σοφός three times, in the exchange between Pentheus and the god (655-656).

The divine and eternal nature of ancestral traditions, of which the Dionysiac cult is one, is emphasised by Teiresias in 200-209 in opposition to the limited nature of τὸ σοφόν that human reason can hope to achieve. Accepting the admittedly problematic and controversial transmitted text,<sup>622</sup> I would venture that Euripides declares the failure of human reason (λόγος) to overthrow ancestral traditions as old as time (παραδοχαί ... ὁμήλικαι χρόνῳ), even when human thinking manages to reach (partial) wisdom through the highest levels of intellectual power (δι' ἄκρων τὸ σοφὸν ἠΐρηται φρενῶν). I would argue that not only does this passage proclaim that timeless traditions cannot be overturned, but also suggests that divinity cannot be fully comprehended by human reason alone, thus anticipating the theme of the exchange between Dionysos and Pentheus in the second episode (434-518). The allusions to Dionysiac dancing rituals which Teiresias is about to join suggests that the unchangeable ancient traditions refer to Dionysiac rituals.

After the allusions to the concept of wisdom and of ancestral traditions made by Kadmos and Teiresias in the first episode, the concept becomes more precise in its civic and religious Dionysiac connotations in *Bakchai's* first stasimon (370-433). Its central place in the chorus' first stasimon emphasises its importance in the play, as the stasimon is dedicated firstly to magnifying the figure of the god Dionysos, the deity of banquets, of dances, of laughter, of wine that brings an end to human cares, and secondly to defining the moral and civic virtues of Dionysos' cult. In the first antistrophe the nature of wisdom is further defined through the contrast with excess and actions outside the rule of law and the affinity between calm life and, again, good sense (ὁ τᾶς ἡσυχίας βίωτος καὶ τὸ φρονεῖν): cleverness (τὸ σοφόν) is not (mystic) wisdom (σοφία) and trying to

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<sup>622</sup> Cf. Seaford 1996 n. ad loc. pp. 169-170.

exercise one's intelligence to understand matters that are not within the human sphere only shortens one's life.<sup>623</sup> This is the real wisdom for mankind: to acknowledge the limits of human reason in dealing with divinity and to recognise the essence of wisdom for men: internal peace, absence of conflicts and prudence in one's life and thinking. The stasimon powerfully ends in emphasising Dionysos as lover of Peace, bringer of prosperity (ὀλβοδότειρα Εἰρήνη), who is the goddess who feeds the young (κουροτρόφα θεά) and the simplicity of the creed of common people: to live a happy life and to keep one's mind wise (σοφὸν φρένα) and far from excessive mortals (417-432).<sup>624</sup>

The play's third stasimon (862-911) develops further the mystic definition of τὸ σοφόν and its implications for mankind. Before examining the controversy surrounding the interpretation of the passage, I shall examine its connections with other passages in the play to make its context clear. The chorus sings it after Pentheus' surrender to Dionysos and Dionysos' declaration that Pentheus will be given justice by dying (θανὼν δώσει δίκην) (847) at the hands of the Theban *thiasos*. After a lyrical self-description as a maenad in the wilderness, dancing joyfully in all-night dances (ἐν παννυχίοις χοροῖς) like a fawn in a meadow, rejoicing in solitude far from men at its liberation from the hunter/Pentheus, the chorus meditatively asks twice in a refrain the same rhetorical question (877-881; 897-901): "What is the wise (gift) (τί τὸ σοφόν)? Or what is the finer gift from the gods among mortals (ἢ τί τὸ κάλλιον/παρὰ θεῶν γέρας ἐν βροτοῖς)? Is it to hold the hand powerful over the head of your

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<sup>623</sup> An echo perhaps of Protagoras' famous note on the difficulty of exploring the nature of divinity in Diogenes Laërtios 9.8.

<sup>624</sup> In Euripides, a similar connection between mystic rituals, peace, prosperity and their opposites, *stasis* and strife, can also be found for instance in fragment 453 of *Kresphontes*, where he calls Peace βαθύπλουτε, identifies her with mystic rituals (καλλιχόρους ἀοιδὰς/ φιλοστεφάνους τε κώμους), and invokes her to ban from homes the enemy, *stasis* (ἐχθρὰ Στάσις), and raging strife, (μαينوμένα Ἔρις).

enemies (ἢ χειρὶ ὑπὲρ κορυφᾶς/τῶν ἐχθρῶν κρείσσω κατέχειν)? The choral answer is then pronounced: (No, for) What is fine is dear always (ὅ τι καλὸν φίλον ἀεί).<sup>625</sup>

What is the wisest, finest and permanently loved gift of the gods? Against the traditional interpretation of the passage (see further in this section), I argue that the first interrogative answer suggests a reference to the figure of Pentheus.

That wisdom consists in holding the hand powerful over the head of one's enemies<sup>626</sup> may only refer to Pentheus' violent declarations against the maenads and Dionysos, and his constant reference to violence as a way to solve the polis' crisis (226 ff., 241, 246, 345 ff., 355-6, 509 ff., 780 ff., 796-7, etc.), a trait of Pentheus the tyrant that we observed in 5.5. What else, then is the wisest gift of the gods? In the answers to the rhetorical question lies the key of the play, as it connects the moral and theological themes of the play.

In the first answer (882-896) Euripides emphasises the concept of divine power (τὸ θεῖον σθένος) as the only power mankind can trust, as it punishes the impious (ὁ ἄσεπτος) who in his folly (ἀγνωμοσύνη) does not honour divinity. This is an allusion to Pentheus' beliefs and behaviour: human power over an opponent is a small thing in comparison with the power of the gods that punishes the impious and the outlaw. The chorus then calls "eternal by nature" (ἀεί φύσει τε πεφνκός) whatever has been a tradition (νόμιμον) over a long time, that divine strength that brings to justice the arrogant and insane mortals

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<sup>625</sup> I am using Blake 1933 pp. 361-388 version of the text, followed for instance by Seaford 1996. Cf. also Seaford 1994 pp. 403-405, Seaford's 1996 n. ad loc., pp. 218-219.

<sup>626</sup> Euripides' use of the term ἐχθρός is significant. The term means "hostile", "opponent", and is used for instance for political adversaries.

who do not honour the gods. The reference is to the ancestral traditions as old as time (παράδοχαί ... ὁμήλικαι χρόνῳ) that Teiresias declares in 200-209, those ancestral traditions as old as time that nobody can overturn, not even the most sophisticated thinker. The use of the term “eternal” (ἄει) is significant as it connects for instance this strophe with the sense of eternity of those ancestral traditions that the chorus invokes in referring to Dionysiac singing and dancing rituals. “I shall sing in honour of Dionysos as it has eternally been the custom (τὰ νομισθέντα γὰρ αἰεὶ)” (71-2). The implicit answer is clear: political power in the hands of one man can only be temporary; Pentheus’ has an illusion in thinking he can overcome the infinite and eternal power of divinity and of traditional customs.

In the second answer (902-912), a *makarismos* that closes the stasimon, the wise gift of the gods is connected directly with mystery cults, which may be an indication that *makarismoi* were pronounced during mystic rituals. Here Euripides defines the theme of mystic εὐδαιμονία, the term that the Asian *thiasos* introduced in the *makarismos* in the parodos (72-82), that mystic bliss and fullness of joy in day-to-day life that the cult brings to initiates, a state that wealth or power cannot create (906). In the parodos the chorus calls blissful and similar to a god (μάκαρ), he who has enjoyed divine favour (εὐδαίμων) in having witnessed the divine initiation rituals, keeps his life pure (βιοτὰν ἁγιστεύει), joins the *thiasos*, performs Bakchic rituals with holy purifications, celebrates the mystic ritual of Kybele, shakes the *thyrsos*, wears crowns of ivy and serves Dionysos (Διόνυσον θεραπεύει). We noted in 3.2 the *makarismos* in its early use in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*.<sup>627</sup> Its double appearance in *Bakchai*

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<sup>627</sup> Cf. the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* 480: ὁλβιος, ὃς τὰδ' ὅπωπεν ἐπιχθονίων ἀνθρώπων. Other instances of mystic *makarismoi* are in for instance Pindar fr. 137: ὁλβιος ὅστις ἰδὼν κείν' εἶσ' ὑπὸ χθόν'· οἶδε μὲν βίου τελευτάν/οἶδεν δὲ

connects *Bakchai* with the foundation text of mystery cults and echoes the *Hymn's* moral and political implications. In the second answer of the third stasimon the key word εὐδαίμων is repeated in a crescendo, three times in eleven verses. Firstly, εὐδαίμων is the happy man who has saved his life from a storm at sea and has reached the harbour; secondly, εὐδαίμων is who has overcome human suffering; and thirdly, he who lives as εὐδαίμων on a daily basis is blissful and similar to a god (μάκαρ). The image of the calm harbour and the stormy sea in *makarismos* recalls the concept of ἡσυχία, a term that in political terms refers to peace as opposed to *stasis*, the term that the chorus uses in the first stasimon as the virtue that holds the polis together (386-392).<sup>628</sup>

Central to the choral messages of *Bakchai*, the concept of εὐδαιμονία is often misinterpreted by scholars who have been consciously or unconsciously under the influence of Nietzsche's vision (see chapter 3). For instance, de Romilly writes of εὐδαιμονία as an essentially irrational, emotional liberation, "un bonheur d'évasion", and misses entirely the relationship between εὐδαιμονία and the religious/political implications of *Bakchai's* choral odes.<sup>629</sup>

Two further illuminating answers to the question of wisdom lie in the fourth stasimon, where, after having invoked manifest justice (δίκη φανερός) to punish Pentheus as a godless and criminal outlaw (ἄθεος, ἄνομος, ἄδικος) in a twice-repeated refrain, the chorus affirms its moral credo (1002-1010). As we observed in 5.5, Pentheus is here clearly defined as a tyrant, worthy to be brought to justice by the deity Justice herself. To the Athenian citizens in the audience who would have sworn the oath of Demophantos perhaps only a few

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διόδοτον ἀρχάν, and Sophokles fr. 837: ὡς τρισόλβιοι/κεῖνοι βροτῶν, οἱ ταῦτα δερχθέντες τέλη/μόλωσ' ἐς Αἶδου· τοῖσδε γὰρ μόνοις ἐκεῖ/ζῆν ἔστι, τοῖς δ' ἄλλοισι πάντ' ἔχειν κακά.

<sup>628</sup> Cf. for instance Plato *Menexenos* 243e-244b.

<sup>629</sup> De Romilly 1963 pp. 361-380.

days before the performance of *Bakchai*, a violent end of the tyrant was not only justified, but the civic duty of each citizen. With regard to the divine, the chorus warns, the fear of a death sentence teaches moderation in forming opinions (γνωμᾶν σωφρόνα θάνατος ἀπροφάσι/στος ἐς τὰ θεῶν ἔφυ),<sup>630</sup> while to live within a mortal's limits means a life free of grief. In a cross reference to the Teiresias' partial σοφὸν attainable by the highest minds (203) the chorus here declares the difference between τὸ σοφόν and other things that are great and manifest (ἕτερα μεγάλα φανερά): being pure and pious and honouring the gods (εὐαγοῦντ' εὐσεβεῖν)<sup>631</sup> by day and night. The wisdom of the gift of the gods, the Good (καλὸν) that mankind loves from ever and forever (φίλον αἰεῖ) (881=901) is given here a clearer meaning to things that are great and manifest and lead life towards τὰ καλά.

A further answer to the chorus, one that further illuminates the somewhat cryptic conclusion (ὅ τι καλὸν φίλον αἰεῖ), lies in the second messenger's warning to the polis as he announces the death of Pentheus (1148-1152). The warning elaborates that of the first messenger to Pentheus to receive the god into the polis (769-770) (see 5.3) and links some of the mystic/moral concepts we have been examining, τὸ σοφόν in its mystic sense, τὸ σωφρονεῖν and τὸ καλόν. Moderation and self-control (τὸ σωφρονεῖν) and veneration for divinity (σεβεῖν τὰ τῶν θεῶν) are the finest and wisest things (κάλλιστον ... καὶ σοφώτατον) humans can use, the messenger warns the polis-to-be. This expression thus connects the concepts that embody the moral and civic values in *Bakchai*, τὸ σοφόν and τὸ καλόν. The slave messenger warning is significantly connected with what follows, the choral cry of victory over

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<sup>630</sup> Cf. Aeschylus *Eumenides* 690-692.

<sup>631</sup> Perhaps not casually the term used by Demeter and Hades to qualify Demeter's worshippers in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* we noted in 3.2.



Pentheus and the exodos, that witnesses the return of the crazed Agave to the city, the theophany of Dionysos as a deity that reassembles the community, the foundation of the Dionysiac cult in the city and the reconstruction of the polis' cohesion along Dionysiac lines. The polis is on stage for the first time (1201, 1202-3, 1247): the deity, the Asian chorus, Kadmos, Agave, the silent Teiresias and the mute citizens of Thebes are all present at the arrival of the head of Pentheus in the arms of Agave and of his body, carried by Kadmos' attendants (1216-1217).

Despite the clarity and coherence of the progression in defining the moral and religious creed of the Dionysiac cult in *Bakchai* we have been following, the controversy over the interpretation of the chorus question in 877-881 and 897-901 has divided scholars. The traditional reading of the passage,<sup>632</sup> exemplified for instance by Murray, reads the refrain rather freely as "What else is Wisdom? What of man's endeavour or God's high grace, so lovely and so great? To stand from fear set free, to breathe and wait; to hold a hand uplifted over Hate; and shall not Loveliness be loved for ever?"<sup>633</sup> In his 1944 work Dodds had it as "What is wisdom? Or what god-given right is more honourable in the sight of men than to keep the hand of mastery over the head of a foe? Honour is precious: that is always true."<sup>634</sup> Dodds' interpretation, influenced probably by the Nietzschean notions of the chorus impersonating the irrational violence that we examined in 5.1, reverses not only the role of the chorus at that key moment of the play, but also the ethical and political relevance of Euripides' message in *Bakchai*. Dodds' view, still adopted by most commentators and translators, encounters in my opinion some fundamental problems. It requires altering the

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<sup>632</sup> Cf. for instance Buckley 1850 ad loc., Sandys 1880 n. ad loc. p. 872, Grube 1935 ad loc., Murray 1904 ad loc.

<sup>633</sup> Murray 1904, ad loc.

<sup>634</sup> Dodds 1960 p. 186-8.

transmitted text and stands in opposition with Euripides' whole construction of the mystic cult's religious, moral and civic creed, of its faith in the virtues of moderation and peace, its love of laughter, dancing and singing, its veneration for divinity, and destroys the logic of the answers to the question of 877-881 and 897-901 we have been examining. This sense of the refrain has been followed by scholars as Winnington Ingram,<sup>635</sup> Nagy,<sup>636</sup> Vellacott,<sup>637</sup> Kovacs,<sup>638</sup> Di Benedetto<sup>639</sup> and Mills.<sup>640</sup>

Winnington-Ingram for example has it as "What is wisdom? Or what gift from the gods is fairer in the sight of men than to hold the hand of mastery over the head of enemies? That which is fair is ever dear", which leads him to put the question in a context of violence and power, and to conclude that the "fundamental pattern of the play is that the religion of Dionysos is shown first as the source of peace and joy then of violence and cruelty".<sup>641</sup>

It should be noted that several scholars stand opposite to the traditional reading of the passage in *Bakchai* 877-881 and 897-9001. Observing the inconsequentiality of the passage in its traditional interpretation, Blake in 1933 compared Euripides' use of the particles ἢ and ἤ and came to the conclusion that the second ἢ should be ἤ, and that an interrogation mark was needed after ἢ χεῖρ'.<sup>642</sup> After Blake, Roux for instance,<sup>643</sup> correctly reintegrates the

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<sup>635</sup> Winnington-Ingram 1948 p. 113.

<sup>636</sup> Nagy in Buckley 1850 revision.

<sup>637</sup> Vellacott 1954 p. 223.

<sup>638</sup> Kovacs 2002 p. 97.

<sup>639</sup> Di Benedetto 2004 p. 241.

<sup>640</sup> Mills 2066 p. 45.

<sup>641</sup> Winnington-Ingram 1966 p. 35.

<sup>642</sup> Blake 1933 pp. 364-365.

transmitted text of the crucial chorus refrain and translates it into “Qu’est-ce que l’humaine science (τὸ σοφόν)! Quel est le don des dieux le meilleur ici-bas? Est-ce d’appesantir de sa main dominatrice sur la tête des ennemis ? (Non, car) le Bien nous est ami, toujours !” While missing the connection between τὸ σοφόν and γέρας, Roux thus convincingly rectifies the traditional interpretation that equates wisdom and the good (καλόν) with force and violence. Other commentators, such as Leinieks,<sup>644</sup> and Seaford<sup>645</sup> have developed an interpretation that fits well with the moral and political content of the play. Seaford for instance has it as “What is the wise (gift), or what is the finer gift from the gods among mortals? Is it to hold the hand powerful over the head of your enemies? (No, for) What is fine is dear always”, and notes that the opposition between permanent mystic happiness and the temporary nature of power and wealth is a traditional topic in Greek literature.<sup>646</sup>

In examining the text as re-instated by Seaford, some further inconsistencies of the traditional “Dodds” interpretation appear. Firstly, it is somewhat incongruous for the peace-loving chorus (417-432), rejoicing in the idyllic shady-leaved forest after having escaped the savage hounds of Pentheus and desiring to participate to the god’s night-long dances, to suddenly adopt a wildly bellicose and violent stance and declare it the fairest gift of the gods to have life and death power over an enemy. The notion that the Asian chorus expresses thus its desire for revenge on Pentheus is incongruous: as the chorus makes clear in the fourth stasimon it is not human revenge the chorus seeks,

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<sup>643</sup> Roux 1972 II, pp. 514-7.

<sup>644</sup> Leinieks 1984 pp. 178-9.

<sup>645</sup> See Seaford’s commentary on his restoration of the text and translation, in Seaford 1994 pp. 402-4, and Seaford 1996 pp. 218-219.

<sup>646</sup> To Seaford’s various examples I would be tempted to add Sappho’s answer to the same question in fr. 16, on the nature of ἐπὶ γὰρ μέλαιναν κάλλιστον that concludes it is not armies or fleets, but whomever one loves.

but the intervention of divine, manifest justice (δίκη φανερός) (991) to punish a the crazed spy man who has deliberately breached the taboo on uninitiated men to spy on the maenads (977 ff.). Furthermore, the tone of the Asian chorus in the play is rarely violent, a prominent feature instead of the tyrant Pentheus (see 5.5). In the parodos there is no hint of violence in the idyllic visions of the mystic *thiasos* on the mountain in the company of Dionysos; in the first stasimon the chorus extols Purity (370-3), ἡσυχία and τὸ φρονεῖν (389-90), mystic wisdom and humility in front of the divine, peace and acceptance of the beliefs of ordinary people, sentiments that are the opposite of violence and revenge; in the second stasimon the chorus invokes Dionysos to restrain the tyrant's hubris (555), that individualistic threat to the religion and the community of the polis.

Secondly, the Asian chorus is aware that Pentheus is destined to be punished on the mountain at the hands of the Theban *thiasos* (448) at the order of Dionysos himself, a god most terrible (δεινότατος) in initiation rituals <sup>647</sup> and to humankind most gentle (ἡπιώτατος) (860-861). The interpretation of 877-81 and 897-901 that I reject implies a suddenly active role of the Asian chorus in Pentheus' punishment. This notion would contradict what we have observed Euripides emphasises often, the divine nature of the punishment of the impious tyrant: in time, the ungodly will be brought into account by the gods (824-891), his slaying is an act of justice, performed by τὸ θεῖον σθένος (883-896), by the

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<sup>647</sup> Cf. Seaford 1996 comment ad loc.. It should be noted that δεινός also means "powerful, wondrous, marvellous" (LSJ), cf. for instance the dual meaning in the first verse of the first stasimon of Sophokles' *Antigone*: "πολλὰ τὰ δεινὰ κούδ' ἐν ἀνθρώπου δεινότερον πέλει." I believe that Euripides may have used the term in its both its meanings in the passage, as it fits the figure of an initiation deity both fearful and wonderful, as he had done in the description of the "things strange and greater than wonders" (δεινὰ δρώσι θαυμάτων τε κρείσσονα) (667) the maenads were doing on the mountain .

δίκᾱ φανερός (991) that justice that will slay the criminal with opinions that are against the law (997), not a man, but the son of a lioness or of the Libyan Gorgons (992-996, 1011-1016),<sup>648</sup> the ungodly, unlawful, unjust tyrant (992-996=1011-1016).

Thirdly, the definition of power over the enemy as wisdom and as the good that is eternally friendly (φίλον ἀεὶ), seems logically questionable. In the context of Euripides' use of the word τὸ σοφόν we have examined, it is difficult to associate the chorus' power of revenge over Pentheus with any form of wisdom, whether in its "cleverness" or "mystic wisdom" sense.

Another significant moral and civic concept in *Bakchai* and *Frogs* is σωφροσύνη, the terms we noted Plato associates with the sense of justice (δικαιοσύνη) and εὐδαιμονία (cf. 1.1).<sup>649</sup> As we noted in 3.4 in Aeschylus' *Eumenides*, a work that can be considered an example of the aetiological myth of the formation of the polis of Athens, σωφροσύνη, "self-control", "soundness of mind", "moderation" (LSJ), is for instance the civic virtue that the converted Eumenides welcome the Athenians to have finally acquired, the value that makes it possible for the collective life of the polis to exist (1000). In *Bakchai*

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<sup>648</sup> Winnington-Ingram 1948 p. 116 for instance, seems to miss the point entirely: "When the Bacchanal way of life was first expounded in the second chorus, it was in a studied and seductive context of peace and joy. Now it reappears interwoven with the theme of vengeance and illuminated both by the Herdsman's narrative of destructive violence and by an intimation of still more terrible events in train to happen. And these events are a logical outcome of the Bacchic creed; for they result from the abnegation of intelligent control, from the unthinking acceptance of a traditional standard, and from the pursuit, uncompromising and uncritical, of momentary impulse and the pleasure it offers. The impulse which now reigns is one of ferocity and violence." Throughout his work Winnington-Ingram fails to understand that the violence of Dionysos is a response to his violent rejection by Pentheus performed as a religious sacrifice.

<sup>649</sup> Plato *Phaedrus* 247d, 250b-c

σωφροσύνη and τὸ φρονεῖν are used often as cognate terms of σοφία.<sup>650</sup> The values expressed by the term σωφροσύνη include prudence, mastery of oneself, avoidance of hubris, that individualistic violence that is the biggest threat to the community, a Dionysiac virtue made necessary by communal coexistence. It is at the same time a reference to the sense of collective good and of respect for the community of mystic initiates.<sup>651</sup> The term σωφροσύνη is a central feature of Euripides' definition of the wisdom of initiates, of the communality and cohesion of the cult, in contrast with Pentheus' lack of self-control and lack of wisdom.<sup>652</sup> Euripides uses the term σωφροσύνη in *Bakchai* often: he uses it twice to define the sexual self-control of women involved in bacchanals against Pentheus' prurient suggestions (316, 318), as self-definition of Dionysos' calmness and control of the dialogue with Pentheus, who is not in control and has no sense, σωφρονῶν οὐ σώφροσιν (504, 1341), of the god's self-controlled gentleness of temper (σώφρον' εὐοργησία) of the wise man (σοφὸς ἀνὴρ) (641), as the orderly behaviour of the maenads on the mountain (940) whose religious rituals show good sense (329), as the way Teiresias defines Kadmos and himself, as the only men of good sense in Thebes, μόνοι γὰρ εὖ φρονοῦμεν (196). Opposed to the powerful force threatening the cohesion of the community Euripides notes that a calm life and good sense (ὁ δὲ τᾶς ἡσυχίας/βίωτος καὶ τὸ φρονεῖν) ... hold together households" (389-392). The expression links a socio-political dimension with one deriving from the mystery cults: ἡσυχία is the serene state of initiates,<sup>653</sup> the peaceful state of the *thiasos* in 683-6, and simultaneously it is a sentiment that ensures a situation of civil

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<sup>650</sup> Cf. Herakleitos fr. 112 D-K: σωφρονεῖν ἀρετὴ μέγιστη καὶ σοφίῃ ἀληθέα λέγειν καὶ ποιεῖν κατὰ φύσιν ἐπαΐοντας.

<sup>651</sup> Seaford 1996 n. ad loc. p. 203.

<sup>652</sup> Seaford 1994 p. 405.

<sup>653</sup> See Seaford 1996 p. 183 n. 389-9.

concord where the community's cohesiveness of households is preserved. It is also a necessary collective value in the polis, the best possession (κάλλιστον), humans can have, together with reverence for divinity, τὸ σωφρονεῖν δὲ καὶ σέβειν τὰ τῶν θεῶν, in the second messenger's recommendation to the polis (1150-2). The expression thus prefigures the polis-to-be that will gather all the inhabitants of Thebes and that will be founded on good sense and self-restraint, values that the community will adopt from the *thiasos*.

A concept vital in understanding the political message of *Bakchai* and a term closely connected to σωφροσύνη is εὐκοσμία, one feature of the *thiasos*/chorus' behaviour that prefigures the collective good conduct, order and organisation of the polis-to-be. The maenads on the mountain are introduced by the image of the three well-ordered *thiasoi* of Theban women asleep in the early morning, resting on foliage in a serene and composed way, σωφρόνως (683-6), a term that contrasts with Pentheus' prurient image of the maenads as drunken women in prey of lust (221-5), of inebriated women hunting sex in the woods (687-8). The passage in which the messenger describes the maenads awakening emphasises the collective nature of the maenads' organisation in terms that recall the coordinated and self-controlled order of a military body preparing for action (689-698).

Euripides' audience would have associated the term κόσμος, "order" with the notion of military order, self-control and discipline. As Gold convincingly argues,<sup>654</sup> the semantic universe of the term encompasses several fields of collective organised behaviour: the military order as in Homer,<sup>655</sup> discipline and

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<sup>654</sup> Gold 1977 pp. 3-15.

<sup>655</sup> For instance, Homer *Iliad* 1.16; 1.375.

order in a military sense in Aeschylus' *Persians* 399-400, and in Solon fr. 3.33 the term is paired with *Eunomia*. In the speech Thukydides put in the mouth of the Spartan Archidamos in Book 1 for instance, Archidamos praises the Spartans for being both warlike and wise through their sense of order (διὰ τὸ εὐκοσμον) and self-control (σωφροσύνη).<sup>656</sup>

Upon Agave's war cry (ἀλαλή) at dawn all the maenads, young, old women and virgins, rise in a marvellous good order (θαῦμα ἰδεῖν εὐκοσμία) all making together the same gestures of dressing up in their ritual garb, a ritual Euripides details in vivid images (695-711). The military tone of the passage is emphasised by its composition, echoing the scenes of Patroklos and Achilles dressing for battle in the *Iliad*.<sup>657</sup> The maenads let their hair loose over their shoulders, a gesture that marks their freedom from their domestic customs, adjusted their fawnskin garments, decked themselves with crowns of ivy, oak and bryony and, upon the raising of the war cry by the *thiasoi* head, Agave, all took their thyrsos and assaulted the herd of cattle that the messenger and his companions were leading to the mountain in a gory massacre. The image expresses the immense force of the thousand hands of the coordinated *thiasos* that force to the ground the aggressive bulls (743-5). It is as disciplined soldiers (ὥστε πολέμιοι), that the Maenads fall upon the towns below Kithairon (752). The prefiguration of the polis-to-be as a well-organised and cohesive community of equals is emphasised again by Euripides in the scene of the hunt and slaying of Pentheus by the *thiasos* of Theban women in the finale of *Bakchai* (1024-1152). This is the aspect that Euripides stresses, an aspect largely ignored by scholars who have focused their attention to the supposed savagery of the

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<sup>656</sup> Thukydides 1.84.3.

<sup>657</sup> Homer *Iliad* 16.130ff. and 19.369ff.



act of *sparagmós*. In their hunt for the tyrant the maenads act in the same organised collective cohesion they had in the third episode, leaping over streams and cliffs, and in using their collective force (μυρίαν χεῖρα) to uproot the tree where Pentheus was (1090-1110). The images of the maenads' communal coordination and joint power in the hunt suggest a well organised group of soldiers attacking successfully an enemy position, an impression strengthened by their joint war-cry of triumph, ἡλάλαζον, normally used by soldiers and never by women (1133). Seaford's note on the use of the term ἀλαλάζω<sup>658</sup> may be developed: not only does the term mark the divinely-inspired abilities of the maenads who have appropriated manly military virtues, but it suggests the organised behaviour of the *thiasos* performing mystic rituals in precise military form, of which the slaying and dismemberment of a ritual victim such as Pentheus is part. It also suggests the foundation of the collective cohesive ethos ordering the institutions of the polis, such as the organisation of religious festivals and the workings of its army and fleet. In this light, the fifth stasimon (1153-64) that honours Dionysos and praises the slaying of Pentheus as a triumph, is thus far from Dodds' "song of vengeance",<sup>659</sup> but is a civic and religious call that puts the warning of the second messenger that precedes it in a Dionysiac light as the deity can only be accepted by the polis if its tyrant is dead.

Turning now to *Frogs*, in his plea in favour of the members of the oligarchic class to have their status as citizens restored, Aristophanes uses expressions to define their civic qualities similar to those that we noted in *Bakchai*. In the parabasis of *Frogs* Aristophanes uses several interrelated terms to define the

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<sup>658</sup> Seaford 1988 p. 134.

<sup>659</sup> Dodds 1960 n. ad loc. p. 198.

“good” citizens (719-730) the polis should cease to despise and should use in its service. They are men who oppose *stasis*, men peaceable towards other citizens (εὐκόλοι πολίται) (359), men of good birth, self-controlled (σωφρόνοι), just, καλοὶ καγαθοί, men of traditional education in athletics, in participation to public choruses and in artistic endeavours.<sup>660</sup> Only by accepting such men in the service of the polis will the polis to be considered in the future as having acted wisely (εὖ φρονεῖν) in time to come (705). In *Frogs* Aristophanes’ uses the term σοφός some fourteen times, always in expressions of the notion of “wise”, “judicious”, knowledgeable” “self-controlled”, that applies to Athenians in contrast to the leaders of the ekklesia. In the parabasis he appeals for instance to Athenians as the wisest by nature, σοφώτατοι φύσει (700), laments the lack of wise sophisticated men in Hades (807), defines the two dramatists in the agon as the two wisest of men (894), and the embodiment of the virtues of the Athens of old, Aeschylus, as a wise man (ὁ σοφὸς Αἰσχύλος) (1154). Aeschylus, whom Dionysos calls wise, while Euripides only pleasurable to watch (413), has not only an astute and precise mind (συνετός), but also has that proven good sense (εὖ φρονεῖν) and can teach Athenians much (1482-90).

Aristophanes’ political plea that we shall analyse in 5.11 is directed at his Athenian audience. The contrast between the leaders of the ekklesia, satirically portrayed as the low-class, uneducated men of foreign origins (see 5.3) and his audience could not be starker. In a similar caricature, thousands of wise men compose the Athenian audiences (σοφαὶ μυρία κάθηνται) (677); serious and

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<sup>660</sup> “τῶν πολιτῶν θ’ οὗς μὲν ἴσμεν εὐγενεῖς καὶ σώφρονες/ἄνδρας ὄντας καὶ δικαίους καὶ καλοὺς τε καγαθοὺς/καὶ τραφέντας ἐν παλαίστραις καὶ χοροῖς καὶ μουσικῇ,/προυνσελοῦμεν.” Scholars have attributed Aristophanes’ remarks to his affinity with the oligarchs that had supported the regime of the Four Hundred (cf. 5.1), but the execution of the generals of the battle of Arginousai, some of whom would have fitted Aristophanes’ description, may have had some influence in Aristophanes political stance.

wise thinking (φρονεῖν) is a quality of spectators (962), men with great military experience (ἐστρατευμένοι), men who read books and understand the finest points of literature (τὰ δεξιὰ), by nature the best of men, so sophisticated (ὡς ὄντων σοφῶν) that they are in a position to follow whichever theme tragedians show them (1113-1117).<sup>661</sup>

To sum it up, both playwrights stress similar aspects the moral and civic values on the basis of which *stasis* will be ended in Thebes and Athens. These values are emphatically religious, collective and egalitarian (see 5.11 for egalitarian ethics in *Frogs*), merging mystic wisdom and veneration for the divine with the civic primacy of self-control, organisation and order. In both *Bakchai* and *Frogs* the political objective is the reconciliation of the people and the overcoming of their division, the reconciliation that for instance is at the heart of Xenophon's interpretation of the fall of the Thirty we noted in 4.3. Far from inspiring horror at what Winnington-Ingram defines as "ferocity and violence"<sup>662</sup> the execution of the tyrant would have been perceived as religiously appropriate and lawful by the audience: or at least its ferocity may have been regarded as commensurate with the horror of tyranny. In the Athenian political terms at the end of fifth century we explored in chapters 3 and 4, the end of Pentheus in *Bakchai* would be in line with the example of the tyrannicides and with the terms of the Demophantos oath, while the exile decreed to the royal family would have been perceived in light of the exile traditionally decreed to Athenian traitors and guilty of breaching the *patrioi nomoi*, as for instance happened to the Alkmaionids (see 3.1). As we observed in 5.1, the horror felt by scholars at the scene of the death of Pentheus must, if we are to understand

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<sup>661</sup> One may suspect some association between the term *sophia* as used by Aristophanes and the mystic interpretation Euripides gives to the term, particularly when applied to the figure of Aeschylus.

<sup>662</sup> Winnington-Ingram 1948 p. 116.

the complex impact of the *Bakchai* on the Athenians, be qualified by the understanding that the execution of Pentheus was in Athens politically acceptable as punishment of the tyrant. In *Frogs*' Athens, similar values animate the choral opposition to the people holding sway in the ekklesia and define the values of that Athens of yesteryear that are associated with the figure of Aeschylus, the poet whom Dionysos sends to Athens to save its community through his wise teaching.

### 5.11 Political Implications

In this section, we shall focus on how Euripides and Aristophanes develop in a similar way in *Bakchai* and *Frogs* the political theme of mystic cults as the religious and political paradigm that solves the polis' internal political divisions and grants its reconstruction through moral and religious purity and political harmony.

As we observed in 4.3, the period that followed the restoration of the democratic constitution in 411 was marked in Athens on one hand by the resurgence of the democrats' self-assurance, evidenced for instance by the decree of Demophantos and by the oath-swearing ceremony in the agora it established, and on the other hand by the continued hostility towards democracy of oligarchic circles who were believed with reason to be plotting a new change in constitution. This last was not a groundless suspicion but proved itself a reality when the Thirty came to power, preceded by the rigged trial and execution of the democrat and leader of the ekklesia Kleophon. *Stasis* developed into open civil war.

In this section we shall examine the political stances Euripides and Aristophanes expressed in *Bakchai* and *Frogs* in this period. Both authors had well-known political stands: Euripides may be called a democrat, and so he was called for instance in *Frogs* 954, while Aristophanes had aristocratic views, evidenced for instance by his mockery of the figure of the war-monger democrat Kleophon in *Frogs*.<sup>663</sup> Despite their different political outlook, in the plays the political solutions to the crisis in Thebes and Athens largely coincides, evidence for the amalgamation of egalitarian and democratic sentiments with mystic cults' values that we explored in Chapter 4.

The first, obvious theme in analysing the similarity in the political/mystic outlook of the two plays lies in the figure of Dionysos, the divinity who leads the polis towards reconciliation and harmony in both plays. The choice of this deity, as well as that of the nature of the *thiasoi* and of rituals that belonged to two mystic cults, marks the emphasis the authors intended to give to the mystic cults as source of political ideals and action. The notion of Dionysos as saviour of the polis, common to both plays, was not new. In Sophokles' *Antigone* (1140-5) for instance, Dionysos is invoked by the chorus to come from Eleusis to purify the polis from the plague, a god capable of putting the polis through acts of collective purification, as Epimenides was thought to have done in Athens (see 3.1).

The second theme is that of inclusiveness and equality in mystic cults as opposed to the rule of one man, the tyrant, as values for the polis to adopt and

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<sup>663</sup> The character is mocked in *Frogs* 679, 1504 and 1532-1533 and his trial is mentioned by Lysias in *Nicomachum* 10-11 and in *Agoratum* 8-12. On Aristophanes' aristocratic perspective see for instance de Ste. Croix 1972 pp. 355-76.

cherish. As we noted in 3.2, these values characterised the cults since their foundation and through the development of Athenian political consciousness. In the *Homeric Hymn of Demeter*, the cult the goddess establishes in Eleusis is created by entire population (παῶς δῆμος) (271) and is open to all who wish to be initiated (480). A similar egalitarian note we observed in Aeschylus' *Eumenides*, as the goddess Athena declares that a host of men and women will honour the *Semnai Theai* (856) and that she has chosen the judges of Orestes' trial out of all Athens citizens (487).

As was the case with the concept of tyranny that we observed in 5.4, Euripides' political reflections were conducted in the aftermath of the establishment of an oligarchic regime in 411 and of its moral and civic implications and in a moment when anti-tyrannical sentiments ran high in Athens. Euripides' thoughts on the nature of equality as opposed to tyranny animate for instance *Phoenissai*, a play written at some point in 411-407, at a time when he presumably was also developing *Bakchai*. In the scene where Jokasta fails to convince her two sons to make peace, the moral and civic antithesis between the rule of one man and that of all the people is defined by Eteokles, the man who calls tyranny the greatest of the gods (506). In her reply Jokasta warns Eteokles not to honour Ambition (Φιλοτιμία), as it is better to honour Equality (Ἰσότης), a goddess who since ever (ἀεὶ) joined friends to friends, polis to polis, ally to ally: equality is by nature the stablest principle for mankind (τὸ ἴσον μόνιμον ἀνθρώποισι ἔφνυ) (535-540). The connection between equality and the cohesion of the polis was a traditional notion, for instance later expressed by Plato,<sup>664</sup> who mentions an old proverb "equality produces friendship

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<sup>664</sup> Plato *Laws* 6.757a.

(φιλότης)”, that complex system of reciprocal relationships called *philia*, remarking at the same time that equality also creates frictions and *stasis*.

In *Bakchai*, Euripides’ political thought on the subject of the cult’s inclusiveness pervades the whole play. Great emphasis is given to the theme by its appearance in the prologos. Here Dionysos declares that inclusiveness in his cult allows non-Greeks, *barbaroi*, to join the cult, as the god declares to have instituted his dances and initiation rituals in the poleis of Asia, where Greeks and barbarians are mixed up together (18-9).<sup>665</sup> All barbarians are already initiated (πᾶς ἀναχορεύει βαρβάρων τὰδ’ ὄργια) (482), Dionysos declares to Pentheus later, as they have good sense (φρονοῦσι) (484). The notion of non-Greeks mixing with Greeks and adopting the cult has been ignored by scholars such as Dodds, but it contains an important indication on how the cult defined its socio-political nature. Not only does this passage suggest the context that allowed in Asian cities the syncretism between the Dionysiac cult with foreign cults,<sup>666</sup> but implies that the rituals are open to that vast underprivileged class of non-Greek Greek-speakers, living and working in Greek cities, and in Attika in particular: slaves and those metics whose relevance in Athens whose presence in theatre audiences is attested (see 2.2).

In *Bakchai*, the god wishes to be worshipped by all (ἐξ ἀπάντων), with no distinctions (διακριθῶν ... οὐδεν) (208-9), as Teiresias declares to Pentheus. The god welcomes the old and the young without distinction (206-7): the old make thyrsos, wear fawn-skins and crown their heads with ivy, as the old men Teiresias and Kadmos remark as they meet to join the festival on the mountain

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<sup>665</sup> The term “mixed together” (μυγᾶς) suggests also mixed marriages, and mixed blood progenies.

<sup>666</sup> Cf. Seaford 1996 n. ad loc. p. 151. See also Roux 1972 n. ad loc. p. 247.

to dance night and day in the god's honour (175-89). Gender and social distinctions are annulled in the cult: Dionysos' special appeal to the female element of the population of Thebes (32-6) reveals the openness or perhaps even the special role reserved to women in the cult. This stands in sharp contrast with the attitude to gender of Pentheus the tyrant, as he considers it beyond everything to have to suffer at the hands of mere women (785-6). All participate in the god's banquets, as the god ignores human social differences in giving his gift of wine that frees mankind from pain to all without distinctions, to the rich and powerful as well as to the poor (ἴσα ἔς τε τὸν ὀλβιον/τόν τε χείρονα) (421-3). It is two poor people who make recommendations to the ruler and its citizens on how to accept Dionysos and his cult: a herdsman (769-770, 776) and a slave (1150-1152). These definitions mirror the wide inclusivity of the mystic cults, wider than that of the fifth-century demos, and the identity between the whole people and the peaceful community of Dionysiac initiates: a message of Dionysiac reconciliation, peace and equality that would have been of significance in post-411 Athens and particularly, as noted by Xenophon, in the democratic opposition to the Thirty (see 4.3).

What equality means for Euripides is expressed concisely in the conclusion of *Bakchai's* first stasimon (370-433), a choral song that may be defined as the moral and political manifesto of mystic cults in the play and develops Teiresias' and Kadmos' evocation of the cult expressed in the play's first episode. At the end of it, the chorus of Asian maenads states its civic and religious allegiance to what the humblest in the mass of people (τὸ πλῆθος ὃ τι/τὸ φαυλότερον), believes in and practices (427-432).<sup>667</sup> It is a remark of great importance, and more so because of the emphasis given to it by its position at the end of the first

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<sup>667</sup> Cf. Aristotle *Poetics* 1449a defining comedy as being μίμησις φαυλοτέρων.



stasimon of the play. Not only does Euripides stress the all-inclusiveness of the Dionysiac cult by using the term *πλήθος*, a term that traditionally defines the mass of people in opposition to those in power, the lower classes as opposed to the *kaloi kagathoi*, but suggests a more radical concept, that of aligning the values of the polis to those of the mass of the people that includes foreigners, metics and slaves. This political notion, sung by the Asian *thiasos*, is different and more radical than the egalitarian features of the cult that precede it. The god's recommendation is for the whole polis to adopt the values of the "humblest in the mass of people". What are these values? They are contained in the civic and religious recommendations of the two humblest of Thebans who come on stage, the messengers, the first a herdsman, the second a slave, a theme we observed in 5.3: the acceptance of the divinity of Dionysos (in 449-450, an observation that follows immediately the first stasimon, and in 769-777, and moral and political moderation, coupled with religious devotion (1150). These two essential definitions are the summary of all the choral declarations on mystic and political values in *Bakchai*, and the fact that they are uttered by the humblest of citizens is not accidental.

Commentators have either misread entirely or given little importance to the moral and political content that marks the Asian chorus in *Bakchai* since its entry into the orchestra. Putting at the centre of his interpretation the irrational fury and violence of the *thiasoi*, Winnington-Ingram for instance entirely misses the political content of the play's first stasimon, and defines the chorus' aspiration to "contentment" as a "negligible ideal", the gift of wine a "Lethean source of oblivion", and dismisses the reference to the common man, as he can be "courageous, loyal, cruel and treacherous, violent, patient and crassly

stupid".<sup>668</sup> Dodds in contrast,<sup>669</sup> puts the passage's egalitarian note in the context of Euripides' "deeper kinship with the intuitive wisdom of the people than with the arid cleverness of the individuals", but unfortunately does not pursue his interesting note on the nature of Dionysos as an egalitarian god and on his worship that "probably made its original appeal to people who had no citizen rights and were excluded from the older cults associated with the great families". While Musurillo relegates the political relevance of the stasimon to noting that the social equality is "suggestive of the equality of nature", he follows Winnington-Ingram in emphasizing the alleged ambiguous nature of the play and in contrasting the passage's "peaceful acceptance of the god who brings laughter and dancing to the wail of flutes" to the finale of the play, "where there is a touch of the malign".<sup>670</sup> Among commentators, to the best of my knowledge only Seaford<sup>671</sup> and Di Benedetto<sup>672</sup> point out that the expression implies the egalitarian nature of the polis. In his comment Di Benedetto correctly notes that in the last antistrophe of the stasimon the Dionysiac cult comes close to a political vision, as the basic values of the cult are those of the well-ordered polis and correctly puts *Bakchai* in the context of the restoration of democracy after the coup of 411.

In *Frogs* the Eleusinian initiates' community is animated by the same egalitarian principles that animates it in *Bakchai*: the *thiasos* of initiates is explicitly composed by women and men (157), it includes old people (345) and young (352). As was the case for Teiresias and Kadmos in *Bakchai*, in *Frogs* old people

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<sup>668</sup> Winnington-Ingram 1948 pp. 176-8.

<sup>669</sup> Dodds 1960 n. 430-3, p. 128-130.

<sup>670</sup> Musurillo 1966 pp. 299-309.

<sup>671</sup> Seaford 1996 n. 430, p. 185.

<sup>672</sup> Di Benedetto 2004 p. 107-114.

dance (γόνυ πάλλεται γερόντων), in the company of Dionysos, shaking off through worship their griefs and the weariness of their years (345-50). At the end of *Frogs*' parodos, as the chorus sings in its procession to the meadows of Demeter of their blissful state as initiates who alone can enjoy the light of the sun and of the torches of initiation rituals (ἥλιος/καὶ φέγγος ἱερόν) and of those who have been initiated and who treat in pious reverence (εὐσέβεια) not only *xenoi*, as the unwritten law of *philia* would command, but also the man in the street, τοὺς ἰδιώτας (445-460). Mystic initiation is here paired with a civic and moral virtue, that of treating with respect the humblest people. The use of the concept of εὐσέβεια marks the seriousness and religious tone of the passage, while the term ἰδιώτης has the same connotations of *Bakchai*'s πλῆθος: it designates in general the ordinary man, the private individual, the man in the street, the private individual versus the polis.<sup>673</sup> As Stanford notes, foreigners and *idiotai* were the most vulnerable people in Athens, as they kept away from politics, a class of people left aside by politicians.<sup>674</sup> Despite the egalitarian tone of the choral recommendation Aristophanes is far from Euripides' radicality: respect is not the same thing as the sharing of the same values that the chorus recommends in *Bakchai* 430-732.

Yet, in the play's parabasis Aristophanes expresses political views that may be called radical (674-737). Unlike some other political pleas of his, Aristophanes' entreaty in this passage is entirely serious and not interspersed with comical elements,<sup>675</sup> marking its intended serious effect on the audience. Despite his own well-known and often expressed aristocratic anti-war and anti-demos views, in *Frogs* Aristophanes chooses to focus there on social and political

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<sup>673</sup> Cf. for instance Thukydides 1.124; Plutarch *Theseus* 24.2. Cf also Plato *Laws* 777 d-e.

<sup>674</sup> Stanford 1958 n. 454-9, pp. 112-3. .

<sup>675</sup> As for instance in *Lysistrata* 1114-77.

equality in terms not dissimilar to those in *Bakchai*, and made more actual by the partial enfranchisement of the slave element of the fleet crews who had survived the battle of Arginousai.<sup>676</sup> A comparison of the political passages in *Bakchai*'s first stasimon and *Frogs*' parabasis helps to shed some light on the much-discussed question of Aristophanes' political views. As noted in 5.1, commentators on *Frogs* have mainly focused on the theme of Aristophanes' political views with regard to his defence of oligarchic circles who had been disenfranchised after the fall of the Four Hundred; on the political reasons that led to the Patrokleides' decree; and to the reasons for the play to have been produced again, probably at the Lenaia festival the following year.

I believe that these complex but perhaps secondary questions have obscured the main aim of the appeal, the chorus' radical plea for equality (ἐξισῶσαι τοὺς πολίτας), the theme that Aristophanes declares as first in importance together with the need for the removal of fear for all citizens (687-8), together with his call to give full citizenship to all serving with Athenians in the fleet (ὅστις ἂν ξυνναυμαχῇ) (701-2). While it is certain that Aristophanes calls for the right of the disenfranchised aristocrats to plead their cause and clear themselves of any charge, there is a significant connection between Aristophanes' description of the egalitarian Eleusinian *thiasos* in *Frogs*, his approval of the radical decision the ekklesia had taken to give some civil rights to the slaves manning the fleet fighting at Arginousai and his call to widen it to all who had fought with the fleet.

To permanently accept as family members, citizens with full rights (συγγενεῖς, ἐπιτίμοι καὶ πολῖται) all who fight in the fleet would have included those who

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<sup>676</sup> Xenophon, *Hellenika*, 1.6.24.

had fought at Arginousai, not only slaves, but metics and foreign mercenaries. Given Greek high civic and religious respect for the *genos*, for the rights and obligations of citizens and Athenian restrictive laws on citizenship, Aristophanes' political call is in *Frogs* more innovative and egalitarian than most scholars acknowledge. Aristophanes' political posture is thus somehow contradictory: on one hand egalitarian and mystic, on the other elitist and aristocratic. But political notions in fifth-century Athens were markedly different from ours, and political opinions probably more fluid and less ideologically definite than they are in modern times. The notion of claiming a return to a role in serving the polis of the noble, self-controlled and just *kaloi kagathoi* (727-8) that Aristophanes pleads for in *Frogs* is not necessarily incongruous with his egalitarian posture in the same play. As de Ste. Croix for instance remarks, the notion of *kaloi kai agathoi* in Aristophanes' days denoted excellence and distinction, marked well-behaved and respectable citizens, and did not define a group of people united by their political views or social milieu.<sup>677</sup> In fact, Aristophanes' view may well have been shared by the part of oligarchic public opinion that accepted democracy, the party de Ste. Croix calls of a "conservative, 'Cimonian' variety".<sup>678</sup>

The ultimate moral and political theme of the plays is that of mystic reconciliation as the only solution to *stasis*. As was the case of the concept of equality, the emphasis Euripides gives to the concept of reconciliation in the context of *stasis* may be found in *Phoenissai*. In the play Polyneikes laments to his mother Jokasta his fate, to have been forced out of Thebes by the enmity of his brother Eteokles, creating the most dreadful enmity between members of

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<sup>677</sup> De Ste. Croix 1972 p. 372, 375.

<sup>678</sup> De Ste. Croix 1972 p. 371.

the same family (ὥς δεινὸν ἔχθρα, μῆτερ, οἰκείων φίλων), a hostility hard to settle in reconciliation (δυσλύτους ἔχουσα τὰς διαλλαγάς) (374-375). Jokasta's answer is a vivid defence of equality versus over-ambition and tyranny (531-558), of the polarity between ensuring the survival of the polis and tyranny (πότερα τυραννεῖν ἢ πόλιν σῶσαι θέλεις;) (560). In the second stasimon the chorus then defines war (Ares) as the enemy of Dionysos, as warriors prefer preparing for war to dancing and singing with lovely garlanded girls and revelries animated by the *aulos* in Bacchic rituals. Ares produces strife, the most frightful of gods (ἢ δεινὰ τις ἔστι θεός) (798), while Dionysos produces reconciliation (διαλλαγή) a key concept in the play (376, 436, 515, 701): these are the polarities of the play, polarities that re-appear in *Bakchai*.

In *Bakchai* and *Frogs*, one of the keys to their political content is the issue of how the polis will solve its conflict. The solution to which Jokasta and the chorus aspire in *Phoenissai*, reconciliation, seems to hover over the plays. The term does not appear in either play but would have been perceived by the audiences as necessary conclusion of the development of the plots. In neither play the political goal of the *thiasoi* is the violent defeat of the opponent/s to the cults and the conquest of power. In *Bakchai*, the sacrificial execution of Pentheus the tyrant together with the exile of the royal family is dictated by their defiant scorn for the divinity of Dionysos' birth (26-31) and opens the door for the return of the Theban *thiasos* to the community of the polis. Only then, as we remarked in 5.3, the polis of Thebes can become cohesive again in its collective acceptance of Dionysos and his cult and can now proceed to follow Dionysos' instructions in adopting his cult and his cult's moral and civic values of equality, moderation and devotion. Spectators of *Frogs* would have anticipated what would have followed the return of Aeschylus to Athens. Far from producing a violent conflict with the leaders of the *ekklesia* and their allies, the

return of Aeschylus under the guidance of his poetry for the polis would restore theatrical performances to their traditional role as the great collective Dionysiac ritual; choruses would again be easily financed by rich Athenians and continue their sing and dance acts; youths would embrace again the traditional education curriculum of *choregia* and *mousikē*, and the ruling class of corrupted political leaders would cease to be listened to by the demos. In contrast with the negative traits of the leaders of the ekklesia, the polis in *Frogs* is imagined to be composed by the *kaloi kai agathoi*, by the legendary Athenians of the past, “noble six-footers, men with an aura of spears, lances, white-crested helmets, green berets, greaves, and seven-ply ox hide hearts” (1014 ff.), by sophisticated theatre-goers, by those opposing the new modern ways of the city and by all those who fought in the fleet, a paradoxical amalgam.

Reconciliation, the end of *stasis*, can only happen between people who share the bases of mutual understanding, which in both plays is based upon the shared values of Athenians, defined for instance by Xenophon in *Hellenika*’s reconciliation speech by Kleokritos, where, as we noted in 4.3, peace and harmony of the Athenian community are urged on the basis of a common participation in Athens’ spiritual and civic life.<sup>679</sup> In *Frogs*’ parabasis (727-729), those Athenians who should be reinserted in Athens’ public life share the same participation in public choral dancing and music performances, in athletics and army training and in school education. In Xenophon’s Kleokritos’ speech, a speech that has deliberate Eleusinian tones and references, the sharing of religious rituals, the communality in participating in choral activities, as schoolmates and comrades in arms is the basis for a reconciliation between the two factions. “Thus ended *stasis* in Athens”, is Xenophon’s lapidary conclusion

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<sup>679</sup> Xenophon *Hellenika* 2.4.20.

of the complex process to reconstitute Athens' cohesion on the basis of a democratic constitution.<sup>680</sup>

The finale of both plays summarises the terms of the renewal of the polis' civic and mystic values. In *Bakchai* the theme implicit in the finale summarises all the moral and political statements made throughout the play by the *thiasos*/chorus and by Teiresias and Kadmos. In the mutilated and reconstructed exodos<sup>681</sup> Dionysos announces to the polis and to the Asian *thiasos* the divine sentence of exile for Kadmos and Harmonia and for Agave and her sisters and also the establishment of his cult (in the lacuna between 1329 and 1330), fulfilling the mission Dionysos had forcefully stated in the prologos (39-40, 47-8, 61).<sup>682</sup> Nothing more needs to be told. The audience would have been left to imagine Thebes as a reunited, harmonic community ruled by the Mystic precepts of the cult of Dionysos, blissfully happy in the performance of his rituals.

In *Frogs* Aeschylus' victory over Euripides and his return to Athens to save the city is imbued with the same civic/mystic themes that animate *Bakchai*'s *thiasos* and is interestingly focussed on the Athenian institution that represents them: theatre performances. This theme is expressed in *Frogs* through the theme of the need for the polis to put collective rituals, such as (Dionysiac) theatre performances and dithyrambs, again at the centre of the polis' spiritual and civic life (367-368, 386-390, 1419). In *Frogs*, the first invocation of the chorus to Demeter in the parodos is for her to preserve the polis' song and dance choral performances in her honour, (σῶζε τὸν σαυτῆς χορόν) (386-390). The choice of Aeschylus, a man who wished at the beginning of the agon to be inspired by

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<sup>680</sup> Xenophon *Hellenika* 3.1.1.

<sup>681</sup> Cf. Seaford 1996 n. ad loc. pp. 252-253.

<sup>682</sup> Seaford 1996 n. ad loc., pp. 252-3.



the goddess Demeter and her mysteries (886-7), as victor of the agon marks the political victory of mystic cults and of Athenian traditional civic values over those represented by the innovator and corrupter Euripides (1015, 1053 ff., 1069 ff. etc.). Aristophanes emphasises the central role of poets as he declares as duty and right of the playwright to teach the polis the right way, through the ritual sanctity of theatrical choruses (686-7) and through a poetical mix of serious arguments and comical expressions (391-2). The task of the playwright is to “save the city”, an expression Aristophanes uses repeatedly in the agon (1419, 1436, 1448, 1450, 1458, 1501).

The gravity and seriousness of *Frogs*’ political message is stressed through the deliberate use of terms and concepts used by Aeschylus in the last part of *Eumenides*, a reference noted by Dover,<sup>683</sup> Sommerstein,<sup>684</sup> Lada-Richard<sup>685</sup>, Seaford<sup>686</sup> and Sells.<sup>687</sup> The use of an Aeschylean model suggests that Aristophanes’ intention was to recall to the audience the extraordinary expressions of civic and religious intensity of Aeschylus’ glorification of the end of *stasis* and of the birth of the judicial system of the polis of Athens in the finale of *Eumenides*. Similar ritual choral processions escort the *Semnai Theai* to their temples in *Eumenides* and Aeschylus to Athens in *Frogs*, blessed by two divinities, Athena in *Eumenides* and Pluto in *Frogs*. Similar religious ritual blessings are addressed to the participants of the processions, a *makarismos* in *Frogs* 1482-1499 and an appeal to *euphemia* in *Eumenides* 1035-1038. In *Eumenides* 1012-4 for instance, Athena makes her wish that Athenians would show good

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<sup>683</sup> Dover 1993 n. 1528-33, pp. 383-4.

<sup>684</sup> Sommerstein 1997 p. 298, n. 1525 and 1528-33.

<sup>685</sup> Lada-Richard 1999 pp. 326-9.

<sup>686</sup> Seaford 2012 p. 276.

<sup>687</sup> Sells 2012 pp. 91-4.

will in return for the good done to them (εἴη δ' ἀγαθῶν/ἀγαθὴ διάνοια πολίταις) by the *Semnai Theai*. The twice repeated term for “good” is echoed in *Frogs* as those great ideas for great gains that Aeschylus is invited to give to the polis (μεγάλων ἀγαθῶν ἀγαθαὶ ἐπινοίαι) (1530). The term σωφροσύνη, the virtue that the polis finally acquired (*Eumenides* 1000), corresponds to the quality Aeschylus, a man of εὖ φρονεῖν (*Frogs* 1485), while the reference to an end to *stasis* and a return to communal joy (χάρματα δ' ἀντιδιδόεν/κοινοφιλεῖ διανοίᾳ) in *Eumenides* 976-87 is mirrored in *Frogs* by Aeschylus' mission to Athens to end *stasis*, to those great woes, painful armed conflicts (μεγάλων ἀχέων . . . ἀργαλέων τ' ἐν ὅπλοις ξυνόδων) (1531-2).<sup>688</sup>

To sum it up, from a political point of view the finale of *Bakchai* and *Frogs* may be considered as a plea for a reconciliation of conflicts and an end of *stasis* in Athens through the collective adoption of mystic moral and civic values and of mystic rituals. In a way, the plays anticipate the process of appeasement that took place in Athens after the defeat of the Thirty, the general and public reconstruction of the cohesion of the community under a democratic constitution (see 4.3).

## 6 Conclusions

This work started by exploring the possible reasons for the similarity of mystery cults' themes in Euripides' *Bakchai* and Aristophanes' *Frogs*, a

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<sup>688</sup> I believe that the reference here is not the war with Sparta, but to *stasis* as in *Thesmophoriazusai* 788: στάσις ἀργαλέα.

phenomenon unique in extant tragedy and comedy and largely unexplored by scholars. Probably both plays were produced in the spring of 405, a period of significance in Athens' political equilibrium, marked by a conflict between oligarchic circles and democrats as well as by tension between religious sentiments and the conduct of the war by the Athenian generals as evidenced by the Arginousae trial. Euripides and Aristophanes won the first prize, evidence for the impact and popularity not only of the plays' aesthetic qualities but also, I suggest, of their political and religious content.

*Stasis*, the ethical, religious and political division of the community, is the central political theme of the two plays. The horror of *stasis*, domestic political and social strife, as well as the fear of tyranny, absolute power in the hands of a single man, were the dominant features of Athenian political consciousness in the fifth century. The values Athenians opposed to *stasis* and tyranny were simultaneously mystic and civic, the basis of the values of mystery cults and at the same time of the polis' civic and political order, values that Euripides and Aristophanes invite their audiences to rally around in *Bakchai* and *Frogs* in a pivotal moment in the history of the development of democracy in Athens.

A comparative reading of the plays in this perspective allows an insight into a seldom explored subject, such as the political influence mystery cults had in Athens, a subject that opens new paths into the workings of the Athenian polis as a body politic and into the elaboration of Athenian political consciousness. The association of the traditionally popular anti-tyrannical and anti-*stasis* stance with the moral/political values related to mystic cults such as εὐδαιμονία, ἡσυχία, σωφροσύνη and εὐκοσμία was a powerful element in the formation of the democratic ideology of the polis. In particular moments of crisis, such as the Persian occupation of Attika in 480, the mysteries and Herms scandal in 415,

the aftermath of the oligarchic coup in 411, the rise and fall of the Thirty in 404 and the reconciliation process in 403 mystery cults represented an essential political, religious and civic point of reference for the Athenian community.

A reading of *Bakchai* and *Frogs* in the light of their mystic/political content allows also a significant adjustment in the way the plays have been interpreted hitherto. The notion of Dionysos in *Bakchai* as the irrational, demonic destroyer of the polis and of Pentheus as the defender of civic order, ultimately derived from Nietzsche, can be seen to be a nineteenth-century romantic vision that does no justice to the ultimate ethical and political content of *Bakchai*. My reading makes also clear the association between the figure of Dionysos and that of the *thiasoi*/choruses in their act of ultimate justice against the tyrant, part of the process of reconstruction of the polis of Thebes under Dionysiac egalitarian and democratic principles. In its turn, the interpretation of Aristophanes' *Frogs* takes new dimensions in its parallelism with *Bakchai* and can be seen in a new light as a strong plea for political equality in Athens and for a reassertion of the central role of theatre in the polis' political and religious self-identity.

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